The CONFIDENCE of FAITH

J. STUART HOLDEN

MANCHESTER COLLEGE

LIBRARY
MANCHESTER COLLEGE

THE CONFIDENCE OF FAITH

BY

J. STUART HOLDEN, M. A.

Author of "The Life of Fuller Purpose," "Redeeming Vision," "The Price of Power," etc.

NEW YORK CHICAGO TORONTO

Fleming H. Revell Company

LONDON AND EDINBURGH

Copyright, 1916, by
FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago: 17 N. Wabash Ave.
Toronto: 25 Richmond St., W.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 100 Princes Street

252
H71

To

The ever glorious memory of my many friends
in that incomparable band of young men
who, for the honour of God and Motherland,
in the days of the Great War,
loved not their lives unto the death.

PREFACE

THE sermons which, in their abridged form, make up this volume have been preached in the ordinary course of my ministry during the past anxious months. They have been selected on no definite plan beyond the fact that each of them at the time of its delivery called forth a measure of testimony from those who recognized in it some voice of God. While it has been, of course, necessary to make frequent reference to the special circumstances and needs of the time, it has been my aim to deal with those sure things which war cannot shake, and which are an interpretation of life in every age. On this account it is hoped that these words may convey a message to many outside the circle of their first utterance and beyond the dark days of our national trial.

J. S. H.

St. Paul's,
Portman Square.

CONTENTS

I.	Through Concern to Confidence	9
II.	Life's Sure Guidance	17
III.	"Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord"	25
IV.	Songs in the Night	33
V.	Can Thine Heart Endure?	41
VI.	"The Sky Not the Grave Is Our Goal"	48
VII.	"Will He Find Faith on the Earth?"	57
VIII.	Life's True View-Point	65
IX.	Standing on the Other Side	72
X.	"He Would Not for a While"	80
XI.	Strength Through Sorrow	88
XII.	Other Refuge Have I None	96
XIII.	"Wearied in the Greatness of the Way"	104
XIV.	The Withering Grass and the Abiding Word	112
XV.	To Flee or to Fight?	120
XVI.	Where Your Treasure Is	129
XVII.	Not to Destroy, but to Fulfil	138
XVIII.	The Long View of Life	145
XIX.	Where, Grave, Thy Victory?	154

I

THROUGH CONCERN TO CONFIDENCE

"He knoweth the way that I take."—Job xxiii: 10.

IT is the depression of many to-day that they cannot see God in the things which are happening in the world. There seem to be few clear signs of His presence amid the downfall of much that has been long cherished. The overwhelming events which are convulsing the nations are difficult of identification with the Love in which they have been taught to confide. Perplexed and mystified, they are asking: "Where is God? What is He doing? Why does He seem inactive? And wherefore His silence?" It is part of their sonship that the world without Him is no home for their souls. If through the mists and half-lights of sorrow and anxiety He cannot be discerned, then there is nothing left in life for them. If He has failed, they are put to silence.

There is nothing in the scale of human suffering more poignant than perplexity concerning those we love. Any suggestion of unfaithfulness or unworthiness which conflicts with our conception of their character causes acutest pain. And this is the anguish of many a true-hearted believer to-day. God seems to be declaring Himself as

somewhat other than they have hitherto conceived Him. The moral confusion which is permitted in the world appears successfully to disprove either His sovereignty or His beneficence—or both. Wickedness wears the garments of triumph. Right is bound to the scaffold while wrong mounts the throne. While deeper far than any personal sorrow caused by bereavement or loss is the unutterable pain of being unable to reconcile current facts with eternal Truth. And this pain is made still more acute by the knowledge that the world is, to a large extent, blaming God for the ghastly horrors of war in terms which do not even affect reverence or respect.

To all who are suffering thus—and they are not a few—the experience of Job is as a ray of light which may enable them to tread the present pathway of darkness with courage and loyalty. For in circumstances strangely akin to these present ones he said: *"Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: On the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him: He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him: But He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."*

I

It sometimes happens that doubts which are expressed about God's character and consistency are unworthy of notice, just because they are light-

hearted. They are not pitched upon any high note of pain, and hence are not even moral. For it is only when the mere thought of anything derogatory to Him causes keenest grief, that the challenge of perplexed hearts may be rightly launched upon Heaven. It is such that we have in view now. We all admit that there are indeed mystifying providences in these days. Truly these are such days as Christ foretold when he said: *"A little while and ye shall not see Me."* But let us remember how in that same hour He gave to His followers the fullest assurance that He should yet be at work on every hand, around, within, and through them. For this remembrance will save us from despair, even though it tests our faith to the uttermost.

It is a great thing when, as with Job, faith though mystified refuses to be eclipsed. That man alone is safe who holds firm to the belief that God is working, although he may not be able to see any great evidence of His energy. He finds within himself that which demands the continued support of His grace; and where reason fails, instinct urges him to maintained trust. If the heart is allowed to dictate terms, it always triumphs over the eye. Faith—even sorely-tested faith—is the victory which overcomes a turbulent world. Men may live without the full explanation of earthly things, but they cannot live without the inspiration of Heavenly aids. It is quite possible to go on walking in darkness in regard to the

reason for things which are happening about us, waiting for the Day which shall declare them. But it is not possible to live without the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Spirit. And thank God! it is not necessary. Whatever vision may be granted therein—"as through a glass darkly"—satisfies, not because it is final, but because it is prophetic of full and complete revelation. To travellers in a tunnel the light is dim, the air is not good, and the sense of progress is only maintained by inconvenience suffered. But the sun is shining without, and they journey toward it. And this is the supporting consciousness of all who refuse to relinquish their belief in God's goodness at the call of war's black horrors. *"He knoweth the way that I take,"* says the steadfast believer, "and because He knows *'I shall come forth as gold'* —refined in the fire, and minted as the currency of the Kingdom of God, to supply the need of the impoverished, and to add to the resources of God in this bankrupt world."

II

If God's discipline is to be rightly interpreted and its lessons learned, an attitude of resignation is insufficient. Reason also must be exercised. *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind."* He Who gave us intelligence is never glorified by the disuse of His gift. And it is a true instinct which endeavours to discover God

in the darkness of these days. In all the circumstances of the present we must not fear to bring His sovereignty to the test of His love. We must measure His permissive decrees of conflict and calamity,—and of death also,—by His declared purposes of good toward the world, that is by His purpose of its salvation by Christ. Faith is only true to itself when it asks: "Can these things fulfil moral ends? Can they lead to God's glory? Can He be known of men through happenings so perverse and contradictory?" And it is this child-like trust which can and must be sustained if our quest is to be saved from querulousness, and our hearts from the chill of despair.

Two friends were one day walking in the fields, talking as they walked of the inscrutable mystery of God's doings. One of them, a man of some intellectual force, whose heart however had never yet been opened to the Divine light, said petulantly; "How can a man of finite mind know God? How can he discern what God is doing? How can he understand God's will?" And pointing contemptuously to an anthill where thousands of insects were busy at their toil, he asked: "How can those ants understand what is in my mind?" Like a flash the answer came: "There is only one way —by you becoming an ant and declaring it to them!" And in that answer lies everything that we need for the enlightenment of our minds, and the establishment of our hearts. For God became man in the Person of His Son, that

we might have this calm, unshaken confidence in Him which was anticipated by the Patriarch. Since He has lived amongst us, we have learned that God's providence never violates His Nature. He does what He does because He is what He is. Christ-taught men are able to affirm in the face of every threatening mystery and frowning calamity: "*He knoweth,*" and to rest satisfied in the moral unity of things declared and unexplained.

III

It is well for our troubled hearts to bear in mind the unvarying process of this assurance. For by their personal significance God's ways are best interpreted. In our own lives we must first and always find proof of His nature. Job discovered in his search for God what we too have to learn—that what is really happening in the darkness is not our judgment of Him but His judgment of us. We may not know the way He takes, but He always knows the way that we take. As a matter of fact, in these days we are all living a great deal too much in the newspapers, and upon the thoughts of journalists who know little more of the general situation than the common man, and less indeed than the humblest believer in God. We are all thinking of the Balkans, the Dardanelles, the Eastern and Western Fronts of the War. For we cannot be blind to the great occurrences there, and must not be uninterested.

But we need to live much more in the secret place of the Most High, letting the light of the Sanctuary shine in upon our own lives. We need more than anything else just now to assure our hearts before Him that the way we are personally taking is the way of His approval. Or we may lose ourselves entirely.

In his dark days Job's respect for the moral law never weakened. Despite his perplexities, he held to the way of God's commandments. It is as though he said: "I may not know what God is doing, but I do know what He has commanded. I cannot see what are His purposes in the world, but of this I am certain: He has bound me by a law of righteousness, and my every energy must be directed toward walking in this pathway. *'He knoweth the way that I take'* because it is His way, and because in spite of my feebleness I am doing my best to live as one who has recognized the perfection of the will of the Lord." And we too, when we wait for Him in the way of His commandments, shall not wait in vain. If, however, we take to the ways of worldliness, frivolity, and moral indifference, we shall ask without answer for explanation of the overwhelming events which encircle and affright us.

With every increase of moral earnestness comes the conviction that life needs to be brought into testing and cleansing fires ere its Divinely-ordered purpose can be fulfilled. And the consciousness that such refinement is taking place,

however slowly, affords a key to the right understanding of God's greater doings in the life of the Nation and of the world. When we, for instance, find ourselves in these days more prayerful and less earthbound, more desirous of eternal good and less devoted to temporal things, more anxious for God's glory and less for our own interests, we are able to comprehend something of what is being done on a grand scale through the stress and storm of war. And we find no difficulty in reconciling its upheavals and sorrows with the love of God—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We deduce the purifying and enriching of the Nation from the painful remaking of our own lives. And though much of our perplexity and many of our queries still remain unanswered, we are able confidently to say *"God is our refuge and strength. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed."*

This is the rest that remaineth in these days for all His children.

II

LIFE'S SURE GUIDANCE

"The Lord alone did lead him."—DEUTERONOMY xxxii: 12.

WHEN events seem entirely to conflict with our well-being, as well as with the assurances of God's Word, it is not easy to maintain our earlier conceptions of His power and goodness. And such a time is upon us now. The terrible upheaval of the world's peace has its counterpart and echo in almost every life. Questions which men who have never made any claim to be regarded as Christians are yet asking—as to where God is, and what He is doing in this day of strife—are also in the hearts of many who have long sought to be His servants. Is He in possession of the reins of government, or have they slipped from His hands only to be taken up by the great Adversary? Can He be identified in any way with the darkened hopes and thwarted purposes alike of nations and individuals? Is not some malign influence at work, stronger than the force we have always thought of as Eternal Goodness? Have we been mistaken in our confidence, and lost our way in the amazing intricacies of the path of life as it has opened before us of late?

To all who are so disturbed—and they are

many—the interpretation given to the fluctuating fortunes and strangely varied course of the Israelitish nation is of reassuring power. In his résumé of their pilgrimage Moses thus summarizes forty years' wandering in the wilderness: "*The Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.*" Such words are surprising in view of the struggles of those years, the days of weariness and nights of anxiety, the stern conflicts with foes infinitely stronger than themselves, and the familiarity with sin and death into which they were ever and anon brought. True, they were supported with manna from above; but there were times when they thirsted in the cruel heat of the desert. And as though in denial of all their early hopes, the pathway along which they followed the Pillar of Cloud and Fire was strewn with graves.

Doubtless Egyptian superstition regarding opposing deities survived among them in some measure. The beneficent providences of life they could understand as coming from the God of goodness; but the evil and unkindly ones seemed to come from His rival. Sometimes one appeared to be in the ascendency; while at other times his purpose was evidently frustrated by the force of the other. But Moses had never been in doubt as to God's sovereignty and constancy. Now as they are about to enter the Land of Promise, full of inevitable conflict with new foes, he speaks this word to gird the people to new courage. With the certainty that God alone has been leading them

in all the strange vicissitudes of those past years, they may look the future in the face without any fear, and can meet its difficulties with hearts elate.

I

In the darkest day faith is never left without witness. To those who look to Him there is always some ray from the Sun of Righteousness to lighten the gloom. And this day is no exception. That the outlook is dark none can affect to deny. Were it not that we still believe in God, we should say it is almost hopeless. But such a word as this strengthens us in the confidence that all our present sufferings are merely parts of His ways, segments of the wide circle of Grace in which His world is surrounded. For this interpretation of Israel's chequered history helps us to believe that His government has not been, nor ever can be, finally thwarted in any respect. The Adversary may originate strife and kindle opposition to goodness and truth; but he cannot for a moment traverse God's permissive will. There is a supremacy of grace in all life's guidances, both for the man who has set the Lord always before him, and for that Nation which in its dealings with other races has sought to be true to principles of honour, chivalry, and uprightness. Herein we may encourage ourselves.

For if the Lord alone is leading at this time, then we can assure our hearts that moral purposes are being silently achieved despite seeming con-

tradictions. The tight grip of Divine love is not relaxed by reason of the fluctuating faith of His people. It will not let them go, even when in their fearfulness they are almost determined to abandon His way. Under its steadying control they are enabled to trudge on through darkness until dawn breaks. Then in the full light of day they shall see that a benign Fatherhood and not a blind fate has been the true explanation of their dark hours. If these things are not so, and if through the untoward happenings of the present God is not leading His people on toward their highest good, we must face the pitiless alternative. We must surrender entirely that idea of an all-wise and all-loving God which has been the foundation of our lives hitherto, and must readjust our conceptions of His Evangel to hard facts which cannot be controverted.

It would seem as though the entire record of the Holy Word has been arranged with a view to the preservation of the faith which it creates in this very respect. That *"the Lord alone did lead him"* is written large in the history of patriarch and prophet, who only reached their eminence of influence through cloud and conflict. Joseph and Elijah, Gideon and Jeremiah, David and Hosea, are all cases in point. But the supreme illustration is in the life of the Lord Christ. Did it not seem as though some strange and hostile deity was in control of the human opposition and hatred by which His beneficent revelation of God was met?

And when He was hurried to the death of a malefactor almost before His work was apparently well begun, might it not appear that the Enemy had triumphed? Yet no such thought ever disturbed His confidence, or deflected His courage. "*I lay down My life . . . This commandment have I received of My Father*" is His triumphant interpretation of that darkest experience of all. There was no strange god with Him. It was because the Lord alone led Him that He came to the sorrows of Gethsemane, of the Prætorium, and of Calvary.

II

That we are to expect disturbing providences in lives which endeavour to follow Heavenly guidance is to be inferred from the pictorial representation of His ways which this word also affords. "*As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him.*" The way of the eagle with her young is well known. By disturbing the comfort of the nest, and even by violently pushing them out into the unkindly air which they must conquer, the eaglets are taught to fly. Confidence is developed by the supporting nearness of the mother-bird; and what at first appears rough treatment is, in reality, effective kindness.

In similar manner God deals with His children for their good. He stirs the nest, it may be, by

taking away health, or fortune, or friends. The comforts of life give place almost without warning to unspeakable sorrows, and the old order is no longer possible to us. Or, the strange creation of inner dissatisfaction of spirit puts us out of harmony with our surrounding. Or, the destruction of cherished plans makes necessary the entire rebuilding of life. Under any or all of such experiences we are apt to chafe. They seem so arbitrary and uncalled-for that we only accept them under compulsion, and so lose their value. Did we but realize that God orders life thus to provoke us to moral action, and to evoke dormant qualities whose exercise shall enrich and enlarge us beyond thought, how gratefully should we look upon unkindliest things! Comfort and ease are never in themselves a worthy aim on the part of those who claim fellowship with the Divine. Contentment with things as they are, is at all times fatal to true progress. Timidity is apt to paralyze energy, until the fearful soul becomes incapable of response to the high claims of duty. To settle down in an undisturbed nest only means a brood of weaklings, which soon become the victims of atrophy and death. How kind then are the disturbing providences of God which arouse us to higher things! Love's disguises do not change its nature.

As the aim of the eagle is to launch her young into the element for which they are fitted, so God is ever seeking to launch us into that world for which we have been created, and in which alone

new powers are acquired by new knowledge of Him. For we do not really know Him until our nests are disturbed, and we feel ourselves alone and unsupported. It is then we come to realize how He can bear us up in trial and trouble. Prone as we are to cling to earth although called to Heaven, we learn then how real is His imparted power for upward flight. For just as the eagle bears her tired young upon her outstretched pinions, so does He support the distressed soul; until we come to recognize that it was for this very thing that He allowed the calamity to come into our lives. Had the nest never been disturbed we had never known Him to be the God of all grace, and had never realized the true purpose of our being. With the discovery that it is He who has led us unerringly through everything of anxiety and pain and loss, we become grateful for the resented thing that has brought us into the Life that is Life indeed. Then, unlike the eagle in this, as we soar we sing. Faith becomes vocal, and its song is of the tender mercies of God for ever.

III

One day our nest is going to be finally disturbed with that disturbance which men call death. And what then? Surely in that day when we most need Him God will not be untrue to Himself. As we have found Him in all the experiences of the present which,

terrible though they are, will seem trivial in contrast with the last enemy whose dread we must face alone, so shall we find Him then. We shall be borne upon His protecting wings, and with "sun, moon, and stars forgot" shall mount into the presence of His glory, there to find the life for which this has been but a preparation. And even that unspeakable experience of dying from which all men instinctively shrink, shall add something to character—and hence to our fitness for eternal service—which could not be otherwise acquired. The stamp of God's leadership shall be upon it, as upon all dark things. And sorrow and sighing shall flee away, as in the warmth and glow of Home we are able to discern far more clearly than we can always do now, that the Lord alone hath led us every step of the way, and that no strange god has had any hand in the bringing of His sons to glory.

III

"PREPARE YE THE WAY OF THE LORD"

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness."—ISAIAH xl: 3.

THE great events of to-day are investing life with a degree of seriousness to which we have long been strangers. As the fortunes of war vary, and the cost of even temporary victories is realized in its immensity, we are all beginning to understand the magnitude of the duty which confronts us, the seriousness of its issue, and the extreme gravity of the situation. While every available resource is being pressed into service, there is nevertheless a widespread uneasy apprehension that all is not well with us. It reveals itself in the secular Press, as in the speech of all serious-minded men. Even those who are usually more or less indifferent to moral considerations are beginning to realize that somehow we seem to have "slipped a cog," and that the real lack of the hour is of a moral awakening and regeneration.

Never was the message of the great Evangelical Prophet, who spoke to the heart of a nation in distress, bidding them *"Prepare the way of the Lord,"* more apposite than in our present circumstances. It was upon a people exiled and down-

cast, whose energies might well have been at low ebb, that this high task was imposed. There was not only objective result to be achieved, but subjective experience to be gained also by the concentration of every power on the business of moral repair. God was ready to help them when they were ready for Him. But Israel could only realize her true destiny and fulfil her appointed mission as she realized His presence and co-operation. Her greatest responsibility was hence to prepare His way.

I

This is, above all things, the call to which our Nation must at once give heed. Who is not aware that the task to which we have put our hands—and be it said, from which we could not have excused ourselves, unless content to be covered with eternal dishonour—is infinitely greater than was at first thought? Who is not conscious that the alternative issues are far more serious than have ever been presented to mankind? Who has not come to see that the situation, as it exists today, is graver than any in which our Nation in all the years of her long history has ever found herself? There is a general expectation and confidence of victory among us, based upon the growing strength of our armies, the amazing organization of our national possessions, and the magnificent courage of our men. And all this is as it should be. Yet it is certain that all such confidence of victory is

doomed to utter disappointment unless God's power is manifested on our behalf. Until as a Nation we set ourselves to "Prepare the way of the Lord," our foes will never be overthrown. Britain's national mission in the world will not be accomplished until Britain's soul is recovered. Our supreme need is neither of men nor munitions, but of a return to God by the filling-up of valleys, the levelling of mountains, and the straightening of crooked things in our common moral life.

Can it be maintained, with any degree of truth, that we have even begun thus to prepare the way of the Lord? Five-sevenths of the population is said to be professedly Christian; and yet there has not been any serious attempt on the part of anything like that proportion of our people to renew the spiritual allegiance we profess. That small groups of believers here and there have given themselves to prayer from the beginning, we are aware. But they are in no sense representative of the whole Nation.

Can it be suggested that our policies are conceived in the fear of God? Have we made any really earnest effort to cleanse our land from the foul blots which mar the life of town and village alike? Is it not rather to our shame that when an opportunity—the like of which will probably never recur—presented itself for following the courageous lead of our Allies in the matter of freeing the land from the domination and blight

of the brewer and the distiller, we utterly failed? And is it not a thing to be deplored that not one of our first rank statesmen has made any public acknowledgment of our need of God's help in this time of trial and crisis? Do not these things go to show that we have not yet begun to tread the one sure path to victory? Public-houses filled to overflowing with both men and women, music-halls and theatres thronged nightly, the Sabbath still devoted by large numbers to pleasure-seeking and frivolity, are not the signs of a nation which is fitting herself to receive Divine help in her struggle against strong foes. And yet we go on fancying that we *must win!*

All this is much more serious if we take the view—which is the right one—that this war is itself a great preparation of "the way of the Lord"; and that these stupendous events are the prelude to the end of this Dispensation. For "wars and rumours of wars" are only preliminary to the coming of the King in His glory; and out of this unspeakable welter of bloodshed, the Kingdom of Peace, which has never yet been set up save in individual hearts, shall rise. This, indeed, is part of the consolation of God to hearts stricken with sorrow by the loss of those who have fallen in battle. If there were no spiritual value and meaning in the sacrifice of precious life; if there were to be no other outcome of this grim strife than the maintenance of national pride, or the punishment of an aggressive enemy; if there were

no pathway of light beyond the horizon where the sun sets in blood—then it would indeed be impossible to maintain faith. But here is the answer to the inevitable query of perplexed hearts: "To what purpose is this waste?" It is to "Prepare the way of the Lord" that our sons and brothers are dying. How unutterably great then is our national responsibility of so preparing His way by true and practical repentance, however great the cost, that their sacrifice be not in vain!

II

Upon the Church of Christ rests the obligation of leading the Nation in prayer and penitence. Her first task is to "Prepare the way of the Lord" by giving a moral lead, and declaring an unhesitating message. This is no time for internal dissension, or for emphasizing sectarian separations. The Church which in such a day as this devotes any part of her strength to the securing of endowments, or the establishment of privilege, is doing despite to the Spirit of Grace. Whatever may be lawful activities in days of peace, her one mission to-day is to declare the Gospel of Christ in all its promises and implicates, and to exert such moral pressure upon the community as shall bring men to His feet. By any and every method consistent with the dignity of the Evangel, the Church must give herself to this work. If ever she must believe her beliefs to the point of declaring them without apology or timidity, it is

now. And when the Gospel is so proclaimed with true passion it authenticates itself. There never was a time when entrance to the human heart was easier than just now. But the Gospel is the only master-key.

Can it be seriously contended that the Church is rising to her great opportunity? Is there evidence of anything like a forsaking of the worldliness which has long debilitated her, or of a return to the Truth which in untroubled days has been so arrogantly belittled by the theories of many of her leaders, and the practices of many of their followers? Are there any signs of a revival of the prayer-spirit, of love for souls, of Divine discontent with anything less than spiritual and eternal results of service? Are "the marks of the Lord Jesus" discernible in her hands and feet and side?

With shame of face we must confess the Church's sad lack of preparation, and hence of fitness for these days. And we are all in our measure responsible for her shortcoming. Only by honest facing of the facts, and sincere resolve to cast up the highways, and to make room for the Lord within His own house, can the Church justify her existence to-day in a world full of human need. If this present tide of opportunity is taken at the flood, it will lead her to fortune such as she has never known. Should it, however, be missed, we believe that the Church will be engulfed in the maelstrom beneath which all that is

useless in every realm of life will yet be submerged before this war has reached its end.

III

If the Nation and the Church alike are to "Prepare the way of the Lord," it can only be as individuals recognize and fulfil their responsibility in this respect. Our land needs more than anything else a race of men and women who are individually living the highest type of spiritual life, each exerting a God-ward influence upon the community. And it is the duty of us all to see to it that nothing with which we are personally able to deal shall be allowed to hinder the coming of the Lord in power to our souls. For only so can we be made efficient in life and effective in witness. Nothing but His indwelling control can ensure unquenched hope, maintain unfailing inspiration, inspire undimmed faith, and create unsullied holiness. And surely the unprecedented circumstances of the hour put a new emphasis upon His desire to enter thus into closest union with His people. With this note the Evangel throbs.

There rests, then, upon each one of us the obligation of courageously facing the measure of our own contribution to this altogether necessary task of preparing the way of the Lord. Are we personally fit to have fellowship with Him? What of the thoughts of our hearts? What of the spirit of our homes? What of the ordering of our

business? What of the habits of our lives? What of the character and quality of our interests? Are these such as unite in giving Him that free invitation to "make our hearts His dwelling-place," to which He never fails to respond?

Well may we say under such searching test:—

"Oh, how can I whose native sphere
Is dark, whose mind is dim,
Before the Ineffable appear,
And on my naked spirit bear
The uncreated beam?"

And to our troubled hearts in their conviction of unfitness and unreadiness comes the Divine assurance that—

"There is a way for man to rise
To that sublime abode:
An Offering and a Sacrifice,
A Holy Spirit's energies,
An Advocate with God."

By His grace, then, and for His glory, let us each prepare His way, by renouncing all that the flashlight of His Word condemns, by reconstructing every relationship which is false to His government, and by resolutely setting ourselves to obey the dictates of His will. And He shall assert Himself in every life thus prepared. In this way, and in this way alone, can we hope to see the sanctification of the Church, and the salvation of the Nation. Surely the unprecedented need of the hour forbids all trifling.

IV

SONGS IN THE NIGHT

"In the night His song shall be with me."—PSALM xlii: 8.

IF ever Christ's followers ought to wear the garment of praise it is when all men are oppressed with a spirit of heaviness from which they find it difficult to escape. Only it must bear no likeness to the artificial and pathetic merriment with which fools are still found trying to beguile the tedium of this present long-drawn-out ordeal. It must be woven on looms of faith set up in the Secret Place of the Most High. And it must be worn naturally.

I

It was at a dark time in Israel's history that the Psalmist declared—*" in the night His song shall be with me."* Despite the ascendency of his foes and the unkindness of their reproaches, he is unmoved. All things around him are changing—but God. He is aware that yet darker days and nights may be before him. He has seen enough of life to know that it repeats itself, and that one day is singularly like another in its uncertainty. But he is determined that however dark may be the night through which he must live ere the light of Eternal Morning breaks, he will still sing. He cannot give up his hope, because he

will not give up his faith. The springs of his joy run as fresh and free in the darkness as in the daytime. He is unconscious of his human audience—which he cannot see; but he is aware of the Divine Listener Whom the gloom cannot hide. So he challenges the darkness with a song. Some few years ago experiments were made toward dispelling London fogs by the discharge of high-power currents of electricity into areas of upper air where it lay thickest; but with very indifferent result. What is, however, up to now a proven impossibility in Nature, is an open secret in the world which lies behind all seen things. Project the song of the Lord into the most impenetrable darkness which ever enwraps the soul, and it will scatter the darkness, making midnight as noonday.

We are in danger of losing many things as the War takes on fresh phases, and demands of us fresh reconstructions of life. Most of all are we in danger of losing the joy of the Lord—our strength. Indeed, some of us are even wondering already, if these staggering events in which all have some share do not make our singing somewhat out of place. Should we not rather pray? Or, if we must sing, should not our songs be the Penitential Psalms? "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land"—a land of loss and anguish, of contradicted faith and violently thwarted aim? And as we thus query with ourselves, the world looks on to see what difference being a Christian really makes to men who have

to live through this night of doubt and sorrow. We are not to sing just to keep our own courage up to the mark, but as a witness to the abiding realities which war cannot touch. While our song in the night is for the Lord's ear, it is likewise for the world's conscience. And there are pilgrims of the night who will never find their way Home but for the music of the Gospel sung in the dark by those who cannot keep silence.

The night is dark, and is lasting much longer than we anticipated. Vitality and energy are at their lowest ebb as its sleepless hours go by with leaden feet. Fears and terrors only half-discerned loom before us much larger than they really are, and almost paralyze our courage. And yet if such an example as the Psalmist's means anything to us—as it has meant to the many who have come between his day and ours—it means that a man's deepest faith will manage to get itself expressed under every circumstance. What has been learned in the light cannot be finally disposed of by a mere accident of darkness. Human selfishness, which, be it remembered, is the tap-root of war's horrors, can and does plunge a world into black night. But it cannot make a Christian silent, whose songs are in his heart. He may not be able to see the score in the darkness—but then he doesn't need it! It may succeed in shaking his confidence in human nature—because it ought to be shaken. But since it cannot obscure the Truth which it confirms, it cannot shake his loyalty to

God. For even war—the most hideous expression of which selfishness is capable—casts no aspersion on the nature of God, which, as revealed in Christ, is the believer's ultimate security. So faith sings on and keeps its patient watch. It lifts up its head, for redemption draweth nigh.

II

It is instructive to recall the burden of the Psalmist's songs in the night, since the subject makes the song because it first makes the singer. *"Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage!" "I will sing aloud of Thy righteousness!" "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever!"* He sings of God's Law, of His rectitude in His dealings with His people, and of His everlasting mercy, because it is on these things that his soul feeds. Personal experience of their reality forbids any fluctuation of confidence. In himself he has irrefutable proof of the Divine trustworthiness. He cannot fear, even though the mountains be removed into the depth of the sea. So he sings in the darkness what he has learned in the sunshine. His faith is vocal because it is victorious over every threatening circumstance.

It is of these great realities that we too can sing in our night of trouble, since they alone furnish us with incentives to trustfulness, and with unfailing interpretation of the present gloom, which, be it said, withstands every challenge but that of

Christian courage. For the statutes of God explain the necessity of this War. If we read them aright, we learn that He can never be passive when sin gathers itself to battle against human freedom. The age-long conflict between light and darkness is part of the Eternal Decrees. It is settled from before the foundation of the world that the Son of Man should bear a sharp two-edged sword to execute justice. Only so could the righteous nature of God be seriously maintained. But since this is established for ever in Christ, we may be certain that wrong must ultimately be crushed. This is the song we are to sing in the night, and to sing bravely. For we need never be in doubt as to the final issues of this present struggle. The sword that is bathed in Heaven cannot be drawn in vain.

And our song of His righteousness shall help at any rate to prevent a righteous cause from being unrighteously prosecuted. Some in our midst are calling out for reprisals against the enemy for his diabolical disregard of every humane instinct, and his murderous contempt of the precious lives of women and children. And there is danger lest authority should be carried away from standards of righteousness by popular clamour—to our utter undoing. Sing on therefore, you who know God, and let it be known that there is a people in the land who believe in the righteousness of God, revealed for all time in One Who endured the full enmity of human sin without making reprisal—

and thereby conquered it. And sing, too, of the mercies of the Lord, which assure us that the discipline of pain is protective, that the smart of sorrow is necessary to fruitfulness, and that pardon is free to a penitent people who seek His Face.

III

What is true of the Nation is true also of the individual. In the dark night of our loneliness and perplexity, when unprovoked hostility has brought heart-sickening disappointment, or when bereavement has put out—it seems for ever—the brightness of day, His song may yet be with us. For it was in far deeper gloom that He Himself sang "in the same night in which He was betrayed." Unstable friendship and unmeasured hatred united for His overthrow. His hope of ultimate victory seemed utterly confounded by events. The shadow of the Cross fell darkly, blotting out all the light but that which shone undimmed within Him. In that night he sang with His disciples the song of the Lord, before going into the Garden to pray and to die. And it is no far-fetched imagination which suggests that it was from the old Psalter that the song was taken—of the statutes, the righteousness, and the tender mercies of God! Only let us be careful to maintain union with Him during the ordinary days of life, and its dark nights will never find us without subject for song, or without voice of melody.

Quite recently there came into my hands lines written by a young missionary in West Africa, who died at his lonely station from blackwater fever. They were found among his papers after his death. Behind them is the unwritten story of a dark night in which he met the tempter—and conquered. With strength exhausted, aspirations checked, home and friends far away, and life itself apparently consecrated to the sacred work in vain, he yet sang the song of the Lord, and handed on the torch of Christian heroism to all who should ever follow him into the darkness, as perhaps in measure we are doing today.

"*Don't let the song go out of your life;*
Though it chance sometimes to flow
In a minor strain; it will blend again
With the major tone you know.

"What though shadows rise to obscure life's skies,
And hide for a time the sun,
The sooner they'll lift and reveal the rift,
If you let the melody run.

"*Don't let the song go out of your life;*
Though your voice may have lost its trill,
Though the tremulous note may die in your throat,
Let it sing in your spirit still.

"*Don't let the song go out of your life;*
Let it ring in the soul while here;
And when you go hence, 'twill follow you thence,
And live on in another sphere."

Remember, any one can sing when the day breaks—if he's awake. But only he whose faith has ceased to be deliberate and has become instinctive can sing in such a night as this, and can thus help to scatter the fear which threatens the peace of the faint-hearted, and the deadly fatalism which blinds thoughtless men to the real issues confronting us.

One glad day the darkness will vanish at Christ's Glorious Appearing. With the swiftness of the lightning flash He will come, driving the blackness before Him, and gathering the children of the Day to the joy of His presence. May He surprise us singing the song of Moses and the Lamb —that is, of the statutes of the Lord, and of His redeeming righteousness and mercy! For then we shall continue it in the Homeland; where they sing not a new song, but "*as it were* a new song." The song of the gloom is still the song of the Glory; only, sung there with new melody of understanding and new harmony of fulfilled longing, it sounds "as it were" new! If, however, we fail to learn it here, eternity itself will not recover our lost opportunity. This is the true value and meaning of these days and nights of darkness. And this is the obligation which they urge upon us all—that we should show forth the praises of Him Who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. For it is thus that souls are won, even in such a time as this present.

V

CAN THINE HEART ENDURE?

"Can thine heart endure?"—EZEKIEL xxii: 14.

EVENTS have made us all profoundly distrustful of the shallow optimism of the earlier days of the War. Again and again its assumptions have been confounded by subsequent events; and we are now more widely awake to the seriousness of the situation, and to the certainty that further suffering awaits us ere the victorious end is reached. We know now that our every resource will be strained to the utmost, and that severe as has been the struggle hitherto, it must be yet fiercer before the Cause in which the sword was reluctantly drawn is vindicated, and our righteous objective is achieved. This has been brought home afresh to us by that measure of the horrors of warfare which has recently come to our own land, and which by common consent is by no means all that we must expect. As the strain increases, the question which many are asking is as to whether we can hold out—not in respect of material things, for we believe that by recent measures the problems connected with men, munitions, and money are now more or less solved. It is in regard to our moral resources that the most

serious minds in the country are apprehensive—and not without abundant reason.

It must be confessed that the manners and bearing of a large section of the community do not suggest endurance, for they do not suggest vision. The true significance of events does not seem to have dawned upon great numbers, and "where there is no vision the people perish." On every hand we see men and women almost feverishly seeking diversion of mind—against which, in its place, nothing is to be said—rather than inspiration of heart. There seems to be in the community but little of that spirit which faces a great urgency with a great resolve. The War has brought much to light in our National life, but it has revealed nothing so vividly as the inadequacy of our professed faith. People are simply not turning to God with seriousness of purpose to any appreciable extent. And though the days become no lighter, nor the outlook (so far as the human horizon bounds it) any more hopeful, we are yet very far from such moral and spiritual revival as would suggest an assuring answer to the query: Can we hold out?

Of the many considerations which press upon us just now, this must appeal with strongest force to Christians. For they alone of the entire community possess the true secret of endurance, and upon them rests the responsibility of effectively commending it to an unconvinced people.

I

The Word of God is the Book of Endurance. It abounds in exhortations to His servants to endure hardness, and even affliction, in the carrying out of their commission. It declares that all who call themselves His sons must prepare to endure chastening. It promises rich reward to the men who worthily endure temptation. It condemns those whose purpose endures "but for a while," and commends with promise of salvation those who endure to the end. It reveals the foundation of all redeeming influence in the fact of Christ's own endurance of the Cross; and bids His disciples "consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself," lest they become wearied and faint in their minds. And its final encouragements to faith are expressed in terms of the Divine endurance. For it is the refrain of Psalmist and Apostle alike that "His mercy endureth for ever," that His love "endureth all things," and that His Evangel endures when all things else fail and decay.

It is thus to the Word of God that His children must look for reinforcement in these days of test. As individuals our measure of responsibility is clearly defined, and well within the compass of our resources. We shall fulfil it, however, only as we recognize both the implicates of our profession, and the claims of God. It is our conviction that the spiritual issues of the present National

struggle—which are the real ones—are largely, if not entirely, in the hands of the avowed people of God. It is their part to strengthen the Nation's fortitude, to establish those who are becoming faint-hearted, and to illumine the present darkness by their own sheer belief in the faithfulness of the Lord. Are we all rising to this, the height of our calling? Is it our inspiring consciousness that we have come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Or are our hearts failing us for fear?

II

In days as dark as the present, and circumstances far more difficult, it is recorded of Moses for our encouragement and stimulation, that "he endured as seeing Him Who is invisible." With much less of help in this respect than is available to us, he continued faithful to his early loyalty and to his first commitments in regard to God and the Nation. He chose the fellowship of affliction, when an easeful path was the alternative; and despised both flattery and threat in carrying out his appointed task of leading an undisciplined mob mainly void of understanding, and of impressing upon them the reality and value of life's spiritual meaning so as to mould them into a God-fearing people. Such an one was bound to have his dark hours. Depression always dogs the footsteps of one who, single-handed because single-minded, seeks to bring God to men's recognition and consciousness. When duty is seen at close range to be

no longer romantic but monotonous, when the momentum generated by first effort proves inadequate to accomplish desired ends, and when the value of toilsome persistence is questioned, gloom is apt to settle upon the most ardent spirit. Then it is that the vision of "Him Who is invisible" is at its brightest and strongest. And herein lay the secret of Moses' endurance. It magnified his resources and minimized his difficulties. It encouraged his efforts and discouraged his fears. It constrained his energies and restrained his impulses. It humbled his heart and strengthened his hand.

The great danger of to-day is lest our vision of God should be obscured by the dust and smoke of battle. We can hardly live for a single hour without having our attention claimed by passing phases of the conflict, by some threatening fluctuation of the fortunes of war, or by some chilling fear of worse things to come. Only those whose hearts are fixed where true peace alone is to be found can hope to endure. For only they can see what is hidden from mortal eyes. It is vision of the enthroned Christ which inspires the steadying certainty that all life is planned on a grand scale, and that everything is surely moving forward to a predetermined issue. Since all power is given unto Him, both in Heaven and on earth, it becomes the settled consciousness of those who constantly behold Him, that He is closely involved in all the present disquieting happenings. For not

only are the fortunes of our country threatened, but the interests of His Kingdom also. To see Him sitting above the water-floods of men's wrath and armed hatred, to know that no mere haphazard chance can affect the final good He purposes, and above all to have daily renewal of the hope of His Glorious Appearing, is the only secret of His people's endurance. The present becomes sacred to the man to whom the future is indubitably assured.

III

"Can thine heart endure?" Are the consolations of God adequate in days which for unrelieved frightfulness have no precedent? Is there any available power which can make men stand fast in the evil day? It seems as though the Gospel itself is on trial in the lives of those who profess its faith, with all the world looking on as interested witnesses. Unless its dynamic is unmistakably sufficient for the carrying out of its ethic, creating in Christian men unruffled confidence and undaunted courage, and inspiring them to utmost self-sacrifice in the service to which they are pledged, the world is going finally to reject its redeeming declarations. Continuance is the ultimate proof of reality in spiritual profession, and only as it characterizes the lives of Christians today will men accept the message they proclaim. Upon our proved ability, not only to endure the strain of life worthily, but also to overcome every

influence which tends to divert our energies from devotion to the things of the Kingdom to personal concerns, depends in some measure the very reputation of our Lord. With what solemn responsibility does this fact invest life at the present time when the world is at the cross-roads!

The man who looks up is inevitably lifted up. Such is the power of that vision granted to the pure in heart. He rises above the depressing atmosphere of a war-swept world, and dwells in the realm of eternal and unchangeable realities. The sorrows and anxieties which are blinding so many to the things which war cannot shake, become to him the media through which the Lord is brought within his range of sight—the dark glasses which enable his eye to look unblinkingly on the sun. He endures "as seeing Him Who is invisible." If this is a possibility to us all, it is likewise an obligation.

In view, then, of yet darker days and more dangerous nights, of heavier burdens and increased strain, of fiercer tests and larger demands, this query is pressed upon every one who names Christ's Name: "*Can thine heart endure?*"

VI

"THE SKY NOT THE GRAVE IS OUR GOAL"

"From whence also we look for the Saviour."—PHILIPPIANS iii : 20.

IN seeking to estimate not only the losses but the gains also of the past long and anxious months, one fact stands out conspicuously. The darkness of the night has blotted out much that was unworthy and unreliable, and has brought the brightness of the Star of Hope within men's range of vision. Tired of human expedients which have but discredited themselves, and sick at heart because of delayed relief, it is beginning to dawn upon even those who hitherto have professed little interest in these things, that Christ must verify Himself, if at all, by some sort of interposition upon the course of the world's life. For it is obviously out of gear. The War in all its naked hideousness is, after all, only a symptom of deep-seated disorder. Civilization, which has manifestly failed to avert these present calamities—whose crown indeed they are—is convicted of an unspeakable lack, convincing even to those whose creed has hitherto been the self-sufficiency of humanity. And an indefinable sense of expecta-

tion, not always enlightened by any means, is surely taking hold of men's minds.

To the believer whose life finds its nourishment in the Sacred Word, this is by no means surprising, nor its meaning obscure. In the blackest night he has never been without light in his dwelling. When others are cast down, his heart is upheld by a hope which at once purifies his purpose and inspires his energies. Through the gloom of earth's mysterious events, and the moral mist of its hostilities, he journeys as a pilgrim courage-shod, cherishing the secret certainty of a victorious issue. Even when that irresistible wave of grief which is the fear of us all sweeps his whole being, and the grave covers his dearest, his sorrow, however poignant, is altogether without hopelessness. For he believes that the Lord Christ is Himself coming again. He reads it on every page of his Bible. And he reads it in the instincts of his own heart also. He hears His promise, "Behold, I come quickly," in all the events of the present, and His injunction to "watch," in every fresh overthrow of human conception and institution. Woes greater far than those under which the world shudders to-day may be coming ere this War is ended. But He may come long before that time; and the believer looks for His appearing at any moment, knowing that for His own that shall be the end of all woe. It is his deepest faith that one day, without warning, "*The Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven, with the voice of the Arch-*

angel and the trump of God. And the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air: And so shall we ever be with the Lord." Since the Scripture cannot be broken, it is with these words that Christ's followers hearten one another in this dark and cloudy day.

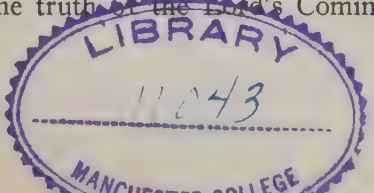
I

I am not of those who affect the ability to piece together the scattered fragments of the Prophetic Word, and to present a finished programme of future events—somewhat as a child plays, seriously enough, with a puzzle. Indeed, I believe that such a conception of Divine Revelation as this exercise involves is perilously like a dishonouring of God; as though He should leave purposely obscure anything so vital to the life of His people as truth concerning His ultimate purposes! For the great fact of Christ's Second Coming is no matter of uncertainty. It is written plainly alike in Old and New Testaments, as the essential completion of the work accomplished at His First Coming, and of His present Session at the Throne of God. The evidence for the fact that He will come, and for the manner of His Coming, is as complete as is that for the fact that once He did appear among men. Around the three great words—whose depth none can ever fathom—Atonement, Advocacy, Advent, all his-

tory and prophecy concerning Him circle. Nothing is for instance clearer to His own consciousness as unveiled in the Gospels, than the certainty that His departure was but for a season. "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself," is the text of His last discourse to the sorrowing men He must leave; and enshrined in His institution of the Sacrament of Redemption is an undying witness to this certainty. Is it to be wondered at that this Hope captured the hearts of those who companied with Him, and that the earliest Christian writings throb and glow with its intensity?

Whatever else may be said of the early Church, this is indubitably true, that its back was toward the world, and its face toward the Coming of the Lord. Its course was steered, not by the chart of its Creed but by the pole-star of its Hope. The fore-glow of the Day illumined its dark hours, and saved it from present fears. Its moral and ethical life found its surest impulse in the certainty that He would come, just as it had found its firm foundation in the certainty that He had come. And the inspiration of its splendid sacrifices, conflicts, and energies was in this same sure consciousness. "Now" was always the day of Salvation, and hence of earnest effort to win men to Christ, since to-morrow might well be the day of Glory.

Are we wiser in our own day? For it is unquestionably true that we have to a large extent allowed the truth of the Lord's Coming to drop


LIBRARY
1243
MANCHESTER COLLEGE

out of our thinking. Many of the theological mazes into which recent years have brought us are largely due to the blind following of so-called teachers who airily explain away the cardinal statements of the New Testament on hypotheses whose acceptance demands infinitely more credulity than reason. And much of our lack of spiritual passion, attested by the powerlessness of highly-organized effort, is due to the same cause. Of course many thoughtful men have been repelled by the altogether unspiritual curiosity and irreligious speculation as to times and seasons with which a few ill-balanced minds have invested this whole subject. And the truth has often been discredited by the rivalries—not always essentially Christian—of conflicting theorists. Yet even so, the Church is without excuse in her faithless and almost general surrender of that glorious Hope which is the ideal animation of her true life. For with Heaven-born clearness it shines throughout the entire course of Revelation. That it is the one message to which men of the world will give ear to-day, and the one truth for which the hearts of His own people are everywhere longing, only serves to emphasize the Church's failure. Oh for a trumpet-voice to sound throughout our warring land, comforting the sorrowful, encouraging the downcast, and stimulating the wavering—"Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh!"

II

There are two mutually contradicting views of Christianity current among us. On the one hand it is affirmed that Christ has liberated a power making for righteousness among men and nations, which is gradually overspreading the world, capturing civilizations and governments, and establishing a Kingdom which shall ultimately be realized, in which all shall know God from the least to the greatest, and in which the will of Christ shall be ideally done. This is the view which is preached from very many Christian pulpits to-day, and which consequently finds widest acceptance. Its watchword is "Work." Its appeal is to human energy. Its vision is of a world gradually improving and developing in righteousness. Its objective is a temple made with hands. And it is as surely out of accord with the teaching of the New Testament, as it is out of harmony with the hellish facts of the War. There has not been any serious attempt on the part of its exponents to reconcile this view of the Kingdom with the opposing answer of high explosive, machine gun, and human butchery. For they are honest men, and know only too well that such theory and such facts cannot be made to agree. A reconstruction of their theology in this respect will not be the least of the gains which the War has brought to Church and world alike.

The other view of Christianity—closest in ac-

cord with the facts of the written Word, which is our sole ultimate authority—is that Christ, once crucified, and now living for evermore, is calling out from the world a people for His own possession. In the present age He works through those who accept His sovereignty and own His headship, to the evangelization of the world, and thus to the increase of their own number; and in the fulness of time—which day and hour is undeclared—He will come again visibly to unite His people with Himself, and to inaugurate a new era of world-government, in which they and He shall henceforth be associated until the end of time. Of the great events beyond His Coming I do not now speak. Many of them are admittedly declared in terms of a vivid imagery which lends itself to conjectures in which men may easily lose themselves. But concerning this fact there is neither obscurity nor uncertainty—that the end of this our age will be ushered in by the Coming again of the Lord Christ, the resurrection of those that sleep in Him, the catching up of those that are alive and remain, and the glorious union of all His people with Him their Lord.

III

Hence we do not look for any gradual improvement of the world. Our faith is not in the slightest degree staggered by the sight of nations consuming one another in a blaze of hatred and fury. The utter overthrow of civilization does not for

a moment disappoint us, for, taught by Christ, we never expected anything else. The setting up of a Kingdom on earth while the rightful King is away, has never been our ideal. Hence its seeming and indeed actual failure comes as no shock. Things are happening just as He foretold —and will yet happen. Peace in this present strife may be made—nor would I say one word to give the impression that our Nation should on any plea be robbed of that victorious peace which must follow a righteous cause righteously upheld. But no permanent peace, no brotherhood of men, can ever be set up by force of arms or skill of diplomacy. The Coming of Christ Himself is the only hope of His people, who in these dark days should be watching for His appearing more than they that watch for the morning. For "in such an hour as ye think not" He will appear. And in that hour "blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching," whether He come at midnight or cock-crow.

The strong conviction grows upon many of the most thoughtful Christians that we are living in the last days. Nor is this a mere emotional consciousness unrelated to objective evidence; for it would certainly seem as though the signs foretold are being fulfilled as in no previous era. Unexampled increase of lawlessness, and decline in respect for the things of God, mark the life of the world and the outward professing Church alike. Yet never was there such earnest longing for

holiness on the part of believers, nor such keen zeal for effective service as is seen in these days. Increasingly they draw away from mere outward allegiances unto Christ Himself. With jealous care the Bride is making herself ready. The fig-tree is putting forth her leaves. "The Lord is at hand."

Let us then lay hold afresh of this glorious truth in these days of trouble and uncertainty. Well has it been said that "while the sinner who realizes his doom cannot look up, the believer who realizes his destiny cannot look down!" It is by the uplifted eye, and the consequently empowered heart and hand of them that live "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious Appearing," that He is glorified and that glad day hastened. "Behold the Bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet Him!"

VII

"WILL HE FIND FAITH ON THE EARTH?"

"When the Son of Man cometh."—LUKE xviii: 8.

FUNDAMENTAL alike to our interpretation of the present and our expectation of the future is the assumption that Christ is coming. Taking His words in their simplest meaning—which is the only honest way of dealing with them—and with no desire of explaining away anything which does not harmonize with unenlightened preconception, the fact stands out with overwhelming clearness that His Return is the only sure goal of His people's hope. The Church has been slow to recognize it, and has indeed almost entirely substituted for its plain declarations various specious theories of the growth of goodness and the inevitableness of moral progress, with their necessary corollary of the universal establishment of something called the Kingdom of God. It does not seem to have dawned upon many who have so taught that there is one serious objection to their speculations—Christ has already contradicted them. For it is certain that He did not anticipate anything of the kind. He foresaw the long conflict between the

spiritual and material forces of life which History records; and forewarned His followers of the danger of faith's decline under the pressure of events which must seem to deny every one of its premises. And He foretold the coming of a Day which should be at once a coronation and a catastrophe.

"Even now we see the Kingdom of God gradually taking over the kingdoms of the world. Christ has slowly mastered the conscience of mankind, and every advance in private and public morality is a new triumph." Thus one of the most earnest and sincere of modern prophets—before the Deluge. Doubtless he and the many who thought they saw things in this light, have realized how completely they were deceived. Civilization—which they mistook for the outward expression of Christ's Kingdom—has thrown off its mask, and now laughs cynically in their faces. Beneath a veneer of decency and tolerance, the unchanged heart of the world has been but brooding its selfishness and biding its time. Now we ask with more certainty as to the answer than we had two years ago—*"When the Son of man cometh, will He find faith on the earth?"*

All the pious imagination of former days has gone. For we know now that it is scarcity and poverty of faith which lies at the root of all this horrible business of war. Mr. Chesterton wrote recently that "the Christian principle has not been tried and found lacking. It has been found difficult and not tried!" And he is right. We are suffering to-day by reason of this very thing; and it must be said that even the unprecedented sor-

rows which have fallen upon the life of the world do not seem to be effective in calling men back to the faith of Christ. How far the responsibility for this indifference belongs to the Church we have no means of estimating. Upon all who look for His Appearing, however, rests the obligation of proclaiming the Truth by every wise and worthy means. For if we are right in our grasp of Christ's meaning, these are the last days.

I

There can be no question as to His finding an abundance of abstract faith were He to come to earth to-day. For if faith is rightly regarded as being that quality which gives assent to things not demonstrable by ordinary means of proof, there is certainly no lack of it in current life. One of the disquieting developments of recent years is the rapid and extensive growth of all kinds of anti-Christian supernaturalism. This may quite well be attributed, in part, to moral revolt from the sheer materialism of the latter half of the Nineteenth Century. Men have become tired of barren negations, and have turned to anything that seems to offer contact with spiritual realities. Hence their response to the appeal of Christian Science, Spiritism, and their more or less allied cults. Without any strong intellectual basis, and indeed frequently without any very obvious ethical recommendation, these forms of faith have gained strong adherence. The more preposterous their claims, the more popular they have become. And the more closely the War presses home upon individuals the problems of the soul, the more readily

are their tenets embraced—frequently at no small personal sacrifice. I entirely join issue with those who condemn the present as an age of unbelief. It is most unmistakably an age of faith. But not of the Faith of Christ—the faith He seeks at His coming.

Christ's followers have no need to contend for any narrow or exclusive interpretation of the Faith as He taught it. His revelation of the nature and purposes of God must always defy human attempt at definition and limitation, however reverently it is made. Christian theology is not, and in the nature of the case cannot be, an exact science. Yet this is abundantly clear: that with every disclosure of Eternal Love in contact with human sin and its problems, Christ urged both by precept and example that faith, to be true, can be nothing less than self-surrendering union with the God and Father Whom He declared. We may differ in our apprehension of Him; and it is certain that as we exercise such faith our powers of discernment and capacities of moral energy will enlarge. But we shall not depart from the confidence that "to us there is one God, the Father, of Whom are all things, and we unto Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom are all things, and we through Him."

It is this faith which alone prepares men for the serious duty of living, and for all that is involved for His followers in His coming. Nor is Christ pessimistic concerning the degree in which He shall find it an energetic passion at His appearing. To suggest this would be to deny the whole force of His teaching. But so also would be the

disregard of His plain warning, to which these strange days have given new meaning.

II

Strong faith may be, and often is, only another name for strong delusion; and we may well be concerned at the many evidences that this is so with large numbers in our land. Substitutes for the Gospel of Christ are everywhere offered and everywhere accepted. The glory of His Atoning Sacrifice for sin, of His free welcome to all who come to Him, and of the sufficient Grace of the Holy Spirit for all the demands of the new life, are literally unknown by thousands in our cities and villages. For from countless pulpits they are simply not proclaimed. In their place we have schemes of social reform advocated as the solution of all human ills. Mere nostrums of sacramentarianism are offered instead of the unconditioned Grace of God. On the one hand a section of the ministry proclaims itself the exclusive channel of Heavenly blessing, and thereby (with appalling lack of vision) denies its own relationship to Christ. Another frankly forsakes spiritual aims and espouses political causes, as being most likely to bring about its objectives. Men are urged to come to the Church, which they won't do, instead of to Christ, which they will. In many theologies the sovereignty of God has been displaced by the deity of man. The authority of His Word has been undermined by hostile criticism in the name of liberty, and its profound statements concerning human destiny are invested with an air of interrogation and uncertainty. The Cross has

been supplanted as the pivot on which the mercy of God turns, by a formless idea of His tolerance. The Precious Blood is unmentioned. The depth of the unspeakable Sacrifice by which the world was redeemed is lost in the width of the Divine good-nature. Nothing is definite now, nor certain afterward.

I am not attempting mere caricature, for the matter is altogether too serious for light-heartedness. This is a simple statement of facts as they appear. Can it be wondered at that under such conditions the Faith of Christ declines? What conviction of sin can such travesties of the Gospel produce? And how can world-weary and sorrow-stricken hearts come to Him of Whom they have not heard? It is not a matter of surprise that so many are turning to systems which seem to offer more solid comfort than an adulterated and emasculated Gospel, which too often is all that the Churches have to offer. This is indeed their hour and the power of darkness.

But is not the professing Church largely to blame for this? Does not the ultimate responsibility rest upon its officers who teach these things, and its members who love to have it so? And do not these present days—which for all we know may be the ushering in of the Day of the Lord —call us all to honest self-judgment in this same respect? For implied in Christ's searching query is the solemn truth that such as refuse to believe in Him gradually lose all power to believe; and allied

to it is the strange saying that the light by which some are content to live is but darkness.

III

Are we to rest satisfied with things as they are? Can we justify the faith that is in us except by devotion to its high tasks? In the irrefutable formula of Archbishop Whately: "If our faith is false we are bound to renounce it. If it is true we are bound to propagate it!" And never was there a time when the need was greater or the conditions more propitious. The thousands in our country who are living in what is virtually heathen darkness can only be reached by a determined forward movement on the part of the whole Church.

"Give us a watchword for the hour,
A thrilling word, a word of power;
A battle cry, a flaming breath
That calls to conquest or to death:
A word to rouse the Church from rest
To heed the Master's high behest.
The call is given; ye hosts arise!
Our watchword is *Evangelize!*

"The glad Evangel now proclaim
Through all the earth in Jesus' Name;
This word is ringing through the skies
Evangelize! Evangelize!
To dying men, a fallen race,
Make known the gift of Gospel Grace;

The world that now in darkness lies
Evangelize! Evangelize!"

I make no plea for any largely-advertised Mission efforts, with their costly machinery for securing some semblance of united interest, their frequently undesirable features, and their questionable permanent good in any community. For it is the undisguised misgiving of many—which I also share—that the abiding result of such efforts is frequently altogether out of proportion to the expenditure involved, and the dislocation of ordinary Christian work entailed. The call of the hour is rather to individual Christians to face their own obligation in the light of Christ's Coming. If this necessitates personal self-scrutiny as to the Faith on the part of some who have unconsciously drifted from early assurances and enthusiasms, let there be open return and renewed allegiance. Who can doubt that such a movement of sincere individuals would soon quicken dead churches, and cause ministries which have become sapless to be bright and fruitful again? Men will certainly come to Christ when He is faithfully uplifted; while those by whom He is uplifted will experience a strengthening of faith in the work of soul-winning, which nothing else can ever give. Shall we not as those who call Him Lord clear ourselves of complicity in the present state of things?

VIII

LIFE'S TRUE VIEW-POINT

"In Heavenly Places in Christ Jesus."—EPHESIANS ii : 6.
"I sat where they sat."—EZEKIEL iii : 15.

A MAN'S conception of life largely shapes his course; and since vision depends in greatest part upon view-point, nothing is more essential, especially in days like these, than that we should endeavour to look out upon all that is happening in the world from some sure vantage-ground whence we have an unobstructed view and a clear perspective. On the one hand it is possible to view things entirely from what may be called the religious aspect, as though there were no other. This is the position of those who say: "Whatever be the end of the present chaos, we are altogether assured of our own security in Christ. However dark the day may be for others, we have an inner brightness which forbids fear. And hence this is not really our concern at all." Such become so absorbed in their own spiritual privileges that they actually forget to be men! On the other hand, there is the purely human aspect from which some see only the calamity of war, its entail of sorrow and suffering, and the unspeakable horror of hostile forces in contest for mastery in a world made for the glory of God. Beyond question, danger to us all lies in

the adoption of either of these viewpoints to the exclusion of the other. The believer must seek, with Paul, to sit "*in Heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*" But at the same time he must also, with Ezekiel, descend to sit with the captives by the river Chebar.

Paul's conception of the work of Christ is, in part at least, that it gives men a new elevation from which to consider life. Of course there is infinitely more in this great word of his. But this it certainly declares: that when a man is laid hold of by Christ, and becomes united to Him by faith, he ascends with Him to Heavenly heights, and sees life thence, not merely in its often perplexing detail, but in the grand design of an overruling God. Isaiah anticipated this very thing when he encouraged men to wait upon the Lord that they might mount up with wings as eagles. And both unite in making it abundantly plain that all such experience of elevation is but preparation for active fellowship in the affairs of the valley. The sacrament of communion with the Ascended Lord equips His disciples for the sacrifice of self-interest in the service of human need. Those who mount up must in turn descend to run with zeal and courage upon errands of mercy, and to walk without fainting amid the common trials and tests of earth. What we need most of all to-day is, to combine the conception of Paul with the experience of Ezekiel—that is, to realize the fulness of our redemption in Christ; and, thus inspired, to

give ourselves to the service of our fellows in His Name.

I

The true order of faith is not that we have to live an earthly life with a view to Heaven, but that we are called to a Heavenly life with a view to earth. The common idea is, that by developing a certain kind of character here, men are prepared for the ultimate life of service and worship beyond. And much of the pathetic weakness of the Christian Church in these days of crying need is to be traced to this misconception. As a matter of fact the New Testament declaration is that all true life is Heaven-derived. It is a gift, offered and received on the terms of faith, to be translated by obedient and loyal devotion into terms of self-sacrificing service.

This is declared and manifested in Christ Himself. It was as the Man of Heaven that He lived among men. In Him the energy of Sonship was transformed into the enterprise of Saviourhood. He came with the life and love of God—and then sat where the captives sat, amid the lepers, the poor, the broken-hearted, the strugglers. And He sat there, not as spectator, but as partaker of their griefs and sorrows. In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful High Priest to them. It is impossible to read the record of that life without realizing that He is at once a Man

Who sits in Heavenly places in unbroken fellowship with the Father, and Who dwells among the people in the drab places of their captivity, to help, to heal, and to bless them.

We are often content to regard ourselves as Christian because we hold to certain beliefs or observe conventional forms. If these present days have done nothing else, they have sifted and judged all such self-deception, revealing the unworthiness and insufficiency of mere external profession of Christ. They have given a new emphasis to the Evangel, recalling us to the fact that according to Christ's teaching and example a man is a Christian only when he is united to Him in this twofold relationship—toward God and men. He alone is a Christian of the New Testament type who sits in Heavenly places in the fellowship of a son, and at the same time lives here among men as their servant for Christ's sake.

II

The strongest solvent of the varied human difficulties with which Christ's servants have to deal is sympathy. By this is not meant an affected interest in the affairs of others, after the fashion of the superficial person who has an ear for every man's concerns, and a heart for none but his own. It is the product of a twofold intercourse—with God and men. It is at once derived in the Sanctuary, and distilled from life's experiences. It pervades the garments of the man who habitu-

ally sits in Heavenly places with the odour of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia; and, when sincere, it rarely fails of its healing mission. Indeed it is the faculty of feeling as others feel because we see as they see. It is the instinct of weeping with those who weep, and of rejoicing unselfishly with those who rejoice. Ezekiel had never been the prophet he was, nor uttered the message he spoke, had he not sat where he did with the captives. For identification with the sins and temptations of others most surely enables us to help them in regard to the fundamental and abiding things. We may destroy men by influence exerted distantly; but they cannot be healed save by the human touch of one who sits where they sit. In military metaphor: The artillery can belch forth its hellish destruction from many miles away; but the Red Cross man, whose mission is to bind up and save broken lives, must get close to them at any cost to himself.

To this fact the history of all great service bears witness. It was as Peter the Great of Russia sat in the squalid cottages of the moujik—coming thither from his throne, that he was able to carry out the noble changes effected in that empire. Elizabeth Fry, descending from the refinements and pieties of a lovely home to sit in the pestilential prison of Newgate, not only lifted the prisoners into something of her own Christian experience, but ultimately made certain also the reform of prison law in the direction of humanity and jus-

tice. And all great missionaries—David Brainerd, James Gilmour, William Carey, Adoniram Judson, David Livingstone, Hudson Taylor, and a host of others—have accomplished their life-work only on this wise. They sat with Christ in Heaven, and with the captives in dark heathendom. And such sympathy as theirs can not be simulated. It is never the product of human energy, but always the gift of Divine Grace, free to all who will climb the Mount of God by the only pathway.

III

Many are talking about what will happen when the War is over and the period of reconstruction sets in. And it is no attempt at prophecy to say that one of the values of this terrible time is that it is making the men who bear its brunt know each other as never before. Yonder in the trenches rich and poor are sitting close, waiting for death or for the opportunity of dealing together a death-blow at organized unrighteousness. And in those surroundings where artificial distinctions vanish, they are coming to have mutual understanding and respect for one another. When the War is over, and a new era of peace begins, things can never be in this respect as they have been in our land. Class prejudices which hitherto have divided patrician from plebeian, labour from capital, will have gone for ever. For which God be thanked! Mutual sympathy is being generated which, in days to come, will be the inspiration of mutual

service. And in this, if Christ tarry, the Christian must lead the way. From the Heavenly places of his privilege he must come down to the lowest depth of earth's need, diffusing the very sympathy of Him Who was at once rich and poor, the Lord of Glory and the Man of Galilee.

The only preparation and dynamic for such contact with earth is separation unto God. Heavenly heights are not gained except as weights which hold us down are cast aside, and cables which bind us to things material and earthly are cut. And it is there, and there alone, in fellowship with Christ, that the double miracle of elevated vision and elevated motive is wrought. How necessary this is, is the consciousness of all who know by experience anything of the elusiveness of motives merely inspired by the sight of sorrow and human suffering. These may, indeed, call forth transient emotions. But nothing save the Spirit of Christ can purify the heart of its evil, and so secure us against the danger of becoming infected by the very things which destroy the lives of those we would fain help. Only by sitting with Him can we be saved from losing heart, as we catch the vision which reveals God at work through all earth's changes, and from the fitfulness which renders service worthless by the reinforcement of His own steadfastness.

Life is for us all a great mission. But we shall miss its meaning and opportunity if we fail to regard it from this double view-point.

IX

STANDING ON THE OTHER SIDE

"In the day that thou stoodest on the other side."—OBADIAH 1 : 11.

ATTEMPTED neutrality in moral issues is assured condemnation. When all life is vibrant with the voice of high challenge, it is the undying shame of any man that he maintains unmoved an attitude of passive unconcern.

To be a mere spectator of strenuous deeds, a looker-on while others labour, a critic of the courage of those who, taking up the gage of battle, "resist unto blood, striving against sin," is the last infamy of which any can be guilty. And yet there are many in our midst whose general bearing toward the great events which are all around us is simply that of more or less interested onlookers.

We have seen them in quieter days among the young men who, avoiding even the effort and discipline of playing games, were content to look on while paid athletes played for their benefit; and who are now satisfied that others should fight and die for them while they read at ease of their exploits. We have recognized them in the men who, from the comfort of established position,

have not hesitated to pass adverse judgment upon schemes and policies directed toward ameliorating the lot of the poor, the sweated, and the down-trodden, and to impute also unworthy motives to their authors; but who themselves have never lifted a finger nor given a penny for the betterment of these same needy ones. We have met them in the women who have been wont to regard everything beyond the sphere of their own petty personal and domestic interests as outside the bound of their obligation, and hence of their concern. And though the grim fact of war has worked a change in many of these, yet we still know them in no inconsiderable numbers within the professed Church of Christ.

The fact of the age-long struggle which is being waged between the hosts of sin and the forces of God in our own land and in the Regions Beyond, simply does not touch them. They are not antagonistic—for they are not sufficiently concerned to oppose. They merely stand aloof, heedless and careless. That their bearing of unconcerned indifference, or at best of but half-awakened recognition, is an entire contradiction of the faith they profess, goes without saying. Of this, however, they are supremely unconscious and careless. And if the call of these present days does not awaken them, it is difficult to see how and whence their awakening can come. For the message of the hour, preached by a thousand strong voices, is that this looking-on attitude toward life spells

disaster. The Church and the Nation alike must be aroused to the critical issues which confront us, or it will be too late to discuss remedies. And in this every one of us is concerned. For it is primarily an individual matter.

The prophecy of Obadiah is in the form of a strong indictment against the children of Edom for this very thing. Judah and Jerusalem were in dire peril and mortal conflict. Strangers had invaded and overrun the land in such strength that the fall of the city was imminent. The Edomites, the record of whose peculiar relationship with Israel forms a large part of the minor prophecies of the Old Testament, were, however, entirely indifferent to the call of need. Instead of going to the help of the weak and beleaguered people, they simply stood on the other side, content to do nothing beyond looking-on. And the scathing words of the Prophet in regard to them are full of meaning and warning:—"*For thy violence against thy brother Jacob, shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever. In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them.*"

In the final judgment of those days and events, Edom was numbered among the foes of God's people. Her passivity in face of the call to courageous action declared her quality, and fixed her doom. She was visited in wrath by God because

of her sin of unfulfilled responsibility—for doing nothing more than standing on the other side at a safe distance, when every instinct should have urged to self-sacrificing share in the conflict. And who shall say that this state of things and its certain Nemesis is not contemporary in this our own age?

I

It is always difficult to analyze the attitude of the present-day Edomite, and to discover the factors of his indifference to the cause of God in the world. Yet it is at least safe to say that one potent reason for his condemnation is his absorption in concerns which have little, if any, relation to his first obligation. In the main he stands "on the other side" because, despite his Church membership and his mental assent to the truths and implicates of the Gospel, his heart is on the other side. He is, for instance, far more concerned in the rise and fall of markets than in the progress of the Kingdom of God. The one to him is at least real, while the other is visionary and of little consequence. His controlling ideals of good are connected with material acquisitions. Nor does he intend for a moment that his personal interests should be jeopardized by participation in moral struggles.

The mere idea of sacrificing "things on the earth" for "the things that are above" appeals to him only as the quixotism of a fanatic, to be

tolerated but never emulated. Enthusiasms in regard to business, politics, sport, or social advancement, he can well understand. Of these, indeed, he is always capable. But a spiritual interpretation of life he deems folly. His mind has become utterly confused as to true values by reason of his obsession regarding the worth of the so-called good things of this life. Selfishness has stealthily grown upon him, until now he has become practically incapable of response to the claims of humanity and of God. So he stands "on the other side," even when the Trumpet of God sounds through the land, thrilling every true heart with the prospect of battle and victory under Him they love.

Such men within the Church are an infinitely greater menace to her true life than are the avowed enemies at the gate. They are the modern successors of the Priest and the Levite whose eternal shame is that they stood and passed by "on the other side," while on this side was a bruised and broken life calling for human aid. Who has not known, indeed, some of this order who have sought to justify themselves by pious utterances about "faith"—to the belittling of "works"? To such there is but one answer. It is that such reasoning is either an entire misconception of the nature of faith, or is wilful insincerity. Most often in such cases there is only too much cause to suspect the latter. Upon their moral and spiritual lukewarmness, which has nothing whatever in common with

true discipleship, the ascended Christ has declared unfailing judgment. The reprobation and end of Laodicean and Edomite alike is never a matter of uncertainty. Those who stand "on the other side" in this day of urgent necessity are, by every law of God and right, determining their own destiny on the other side of the great fixed gulf. Their portion is with the enemies of the Cross of Christ.

II

The peril, however, of the "other side" attitude toward life is not only that of ultimate retribution, but of present deterioration also. For it puts men hopelessly out of touch with reality. To be altogether concerned about one's own ease and well-being, even when a religious meaning is given to these terms—or even that of one's own family, as the manner of some is—is to fail both of understanding and of realization in regard to the true purpose of life. We are members one of another. It has pleased God to make the human family a solidarity. No man can live unto himself except by forfeiture of his birthright. The world which such men create for themselves, and into which nothing of disturbance with their own interests is permitted to intrude, may be fair and easeful. But it is not the real world; and sooner or later those who have shaded their eyes from life's insistent facts, and turned their ears from its clamant calls, become positively blind and deaf.

The wages of sin is more sin, and yet more; until actual atrophy of misused and disused faculties takes place.

Any one who habitually stands "on the other side" in regard to the Lord's conflicts inevitably loses the power of seeing what is happening across the road, or of hearing the voice of need which summons others to service. Henceforth for him life has shrunken to the dimensions of his own outraged capacities. He bears in himself the penalty of his calculated indifference. He has succeeded in deforming himself from a God-created to a self-made man.

III

It follows that such an one, by his studied avoidance of obligation, makes anything like fellowship with God impossible. For God Himself is unceasing activity in presence of human sin and need. This indeed is the whole record of the Gospel—that when the world rushed headlong to destruction in wilful sin, He did not stand on the other side a passive spectator of the tragedy. He saw, and pitied, and came to the rescue—in His Son. Nor during those redeeming years of His earthly life did He ever stand on the other side, remote from human affliction and sorrow. In all points He was tempted as all men are tempted. He acquainted Himself with grief and loneliness, and suffered the varied experiences of the common lot. And the supreme expression and pledge of

His close kinship with those who suffer and strive is the Cross. Such an Evangel as Calvary proclaims—a call to life-giving and life-sharing union with Him—has literally no meaning for the man who is content to stand on the other side except as the measure of his opportunity and of his condemnation.

Herein, then, is the blood-guiltiness of the supine, the indifferent, the mere spectator of God's warfare against the hosts of wickedness. Stripped of every false profession, every excuse, and every subterfuge, the bare fact is that he is not on God's side. To the Voice which bids him "Come! Abide! Follow!" he responds by remaining where he is—"on the other side." That Christ and His people march together in the greatness of His strength, to the liberation of the captive and the righting of the wrong, is nothing to him beyond a spectacle of languid interest. And in withholding himself from the battle-service of the King, he writes himself down as of His foes.

Let us earnestly take heed unto ourselves in this very thing. And let us do so to-day.

X

"HE WOULD NOT FOR A WHILE"

"He would not for a while."—LUKE xviii:4.

ONE of the most perplexing of life's experiences is the frequency of delay in the Divine answering of prayer. There is nothing to which men are so fully encouraged by direct promises of the Word of God as in bringing their requests to the Throne of Grace. Yet there is nothing so completely mystifying as the apparent contradiction so often encountered between their experiences and the Divine assurances in this respect. Some have been so discouraged because the Kingdom prayed for did not immediately appear that they gave up praying entirely! Others, unable to reconcile their disappointment with their so well-founded hope, have concluded that God is indifferent to their prayers, and have in consequence denied their allegiance and deserted His cause! Besides these are many silent souls whose faith is strained almost to breaking-point by the difficulty of maintaining belief in God's love and power in face of the still-deferred answer to the intercession of many days. Their struggle is bravely kept secret, but it is always

there, and their lives are increasingly full of dumb distress.

Now it is necessary to remind all such that God has other scales for the measurement of time than those commonly in use by us. There is a purpose of discipline in His delays which is directed to the highest good of His people, and which cannot be hurriedly realized. What now appears to them as the silence of God they will yet come to recognize as His wisest and kindest speech. When to their fervent request He says: "Wait"—as He so often does—it is only to prepare them for an answer which is beyond all that they ask or think.

The parable of the Unjust Judge, who was induced to do under the stress of an embarrassing importunity what he would not do as a matter of simple justice, is not in any sense intended to serve as a complete representation of God's ways. Indeed he is strikingly unlike Him in every respect save in one particular of conduct—his delay in answering the suppliant. The fact that Christ fastened upon this as an illustrative interpretation of one of God's methods of dealing with those who call upon Him, while not committing us to any strained explanation of the story, affords us an insight into what is to many the greatest difficulty of life. For it declares that something akin to slowness is to be looked for, since it is with God we have to do. There is a good deal to be said for the faith of a little child, which by reason of its unquestioning strength cannot understand the

necessity nor brook the discipline of delay. But there is a good deal more to be said for the tested faith of a grown man, who is content to tarry the Lord's leisure in the confidence that neither immediately nor ultimately can He deny Himself. It is to the creation and development of such faith that all Christ's teaching is directed.

I

There are some prayers that are at all times certain of immediate answer. The sinner who cries for pardon, the weary and heavy-laden who asks rest of heart, the lonely who seek the fellowship of love, are never kept waiting for the fulfilment of their desires. The prodigal is welcomed ere ever he has uttered his prepared confession. The sinking man who cries "Lord, save me" is at once conscious of being grasped by the Hand of power. The Evangel of Christ bears the ageless superscription that "Now is the day of Salvation," along with the countless seals of those who have attested that God is true. It is the faith of thousands, established by their indubitable experience, which sings with the Monk of Marsaba:

"If I ask Him to receive me,
Will He say me "Nay"?
Not till earth and not till Heaven
Pass away!"

Yet this fact only makes the delays of God the harder to understand, when it is with the weight

of present burdens, the weariness of immediate discomfort, and the anxiety of future uncertainty that our prayers are concerned. Surely He Who gives the greatest Gift of all without a moment's waiting will not do less in regard to the removal of the things which appear to conflict with our well-being, and the bestowal of the blessings of which we know ourselves and others to be in need?

Let it be said at once that God is infinitely more concerned with the upbuilding of the character of His children than with the gratifying of their minds. Well-intentioned prayer is not always well-informed. The very things we often ask for would, if granted in our present state, prove a moral handicap, and be the forerunner of disaster. It is of Divine grace that we "have not" when we "ask amiss." I have known children completely spoiled by the weak good-nature of parents who gave to them at once everything they wanted. For human love may be entirely lacking in wisdom. But the love and wisdom of God are one. When He keeps us waiting for secondary mercies, it is in order to make us know the value of the primary and spiritual. His delays are not indications of caprice, but of compassion. If we can but wait in the calm confidence that "your Heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask," we shall come to realize the untrustworthiness of our own impulses, and to submit ourselves gladly to the freedom of His grand control. And we shall see that while seemingly

inactive, God has all the time been working in us, bringing us into a moral correspondence with His will, which alone capacitates us to receive His gifts. In no other way than by seeming to be unwilling "for a while," could He lead us to the place of absolute blessing. It is after His people have done the will of God that they receive the promise by faith and patience.

II

The knowledge of God, which is the foundation of all true character, is not a sudden acquisition so much as a steady accumulation. No man can gain it except by unhurried waiting on Him. The heights of His will are not to be scaled, nor its depths sounded, in a single hour. Nor can He be interpreted to the soul by any isolated experience, however vivid. The steadying confidence which is the secret of every strong life is never the growth of a night. When men hurry from the Sanctuary almost before the purport of their prayers has become real to themselves, they carry away but a confused and abstract idea of God, which is entirely inadequate to support them in the strain of living. And it is for this reason that their requests do not always yield immediate answer. God loves us far too well not to make it almost impossible for us to rush out of His presence unblessed by our approach to Him. Delay in His response to our petitions binds us to Him by the chain of our very needs.

You have seen tourist visitors rushing through the rooms of a picture gallery as though the most desirable thing was to get out as soon as possible. Priceless canvases made appeal to them in vain. All that they could possibly carry away was at best a mere blurred and fast-fading impression of the beauty at which they had barely glanced. To speak of them as "knowing" any one of the Masters to whose work they paid such scant attention would be to degrade language. And can God really be known of those who treat Him similarly? As a matter of fact, how little of Him should any of us know had it not been for the discipline of delay imposed by His apparent unwillingness to answer our prayer? For it is by enforced waiting that transformation of character, which is the attestation of saving knowledge, is effected. This is God's way of fitting His people to be His witnesses. Endurance and radiance are qualities which are never acquired hastily.

Does this shed any light on the perplexing delay we are experiencing in regard to the answer to our prayer for the Nation? In the certainty of an altogether righteous cause we pray for victory which shall make possible a true and lasting peace. Why does God not put forth His power through our Forces, and by scattering the nations that delight in war bring this unspeakable strife to an end? Why have we had no answer back from Heaven that our cry is heard? Why does He delay His coming, when by one word He could

end the whole conflict? And the answer comes that surely this delay is both our discipline and our trial. As a Nation we are yet far from being morally ready for victory; for there are few, if any, signs in our common life that we have learned and taken to heart the lessons of this chastisement. Were an overwhelming victory to be granted to us immediately, it is more than likely that it would only minister to the worst forms of our national sins. We cannot but believe that, in consonance with this His way, God is keeping us waiting for the answer to our prayer, in order to bring us to true repentance and genuine humiliation. But in the last analysis it is not He Who delays the answer to our prayer for victory. It is we who delay Him.

III

Faith is only trained by being tested. It becomes strong and ultimately invincible only by being subjected to the discipline of strain. The perplexing delays therefore in which God frequently expresses Himself may always be understood as being directed toward the fullest development of our faith. For until we accept the will of God, not under compulsion of necessity and because there is no alternative, but by free choice and glad surrender, faith is lacking in essential quality. But when we are unmoved by the fact that we are kept waiting, calmly conscious that God's glory is intimately bound up with our lives and prayers,

and content that if He can afford to wait so too can we, one of life's greatest lessons has been learnt. Faith reaches its triumph only when its exercise ceases to be a deliberate activity and becomes an instinctive attitude. A man is 'more than conqueror' when he is entirely satisfied to wait for the final interpretation of God's ways, and for the ultimate answer to his own prayers, until the hour of His Sovereign Pleasure shall strike. Such an one cannot be touched by storm or strife. And the truth of God, verified in him, will inevitably be vindicated through him before the world.

Let us wait on Him then with unhurried hearts. The vision that tarries will yet come. And how bright will be its dawning.

XI

STRENGTH THROUGH SORROW

"Thou feedest them with the bread of tears."—PSALM lxxx: 5.

A GREAT deal of our perplexity at the untoward happenings of life arises from deficient perspective. For life is like a picture whose details only come into focus as we stand back from the canvas. Its ordered harmony cannot usually be perceived until time has softened the asperities which appear to conflict with our present ideas of good. Then we come to understand that what seemed to us calamity, and the overthrow of our hopes, was in reality God's way of drawing near to bless us. And we realize that the things which in our blindness we would have avoided, had opportunity served, are the very things we could have afforded least to miss.

Just now it may well be that we hear only the peal of the thunder, although in reality an angel is speaking. Our sluggish apprehension is apt to be at its poorest in the fourth watch of the night, and it is our very fear which blinds us to the One Who is walking toward us upon the waves which threaten us. Yet it is entirely essential to our peace, and to the maintenance of faith, that we have some trustworthy assurance in regard to our present experiences. If we can but know that they

are part of the unchanged purpose of Divine love, and are working together for our truest good, we shall abide satisfied. If we have not such assurance which cannot be shaken, then the overthrow of faith cannot be long warded off.

For life demands explanation to those who have accustomed themselves to believe in the love of God. Its facts, seen at close range, often seem too strong to allow such a theory as the Divine care and control of individual lives to stand unchallenged. But not when viewed in their true perspective and relationship. This is why history cannot be finally written in the generation it records. All events need the interpretation of time for their right estimation. And of none is this truer than of those which concern God and the individual. Happy is that man who, looking back upon the past, sees discipline to-day where at the time he only saw disaster; who realizes cleansing in what he once thought was consuming fire; and who recognizes that he has been fed with " the bread of tears " at the King's Table, spread for him in the valley of sorrow and in the presence of his foes.

Such was the confidence of the man who more than any other of his own day was able to interpret the experience of his nation. Through frustrated purposes, thwarted plans, and blighted hopes, he saw the development of God's high purpose. With the vision of a seer he discerned that the people had been strengthened by these very things which

at the time brought unspeakable sorrow upon them. Human tears sometimes mark Divine triumphs. Along the pathway of adversity and trouble, God's people have in every age been led to new enduements of character which could have been acquired in no other way. The Bread of Life has often been ministered to them as the bread of tears. And in the discovered meaning of their experience we may find interpretation of our own.

I

The answers to our prayers are sometimes far different from our expectations. We ask for strength, and gladness, and freedom from burden, because we can discern no higher possible good. And we find ourselves disappointed and puzzled at the inrush of new sorrow which obliterates every token of Divine care. Has God forgotten to be gracious? Is His promise clean gone for evermore? Does our weakness no longer make appeal to Him? These are the reflections which force themselves upon us, and often find us at a disadvantage with our grief new upon us, and our minds under its sway. In such an hour we need to call to mind the fact that our thoughts are often too small and too earth-bound for God to have respect to them. Our horizon is altogether too near, our Heaven too low. Secondary things loom so large in our conceptions of good, that their spiritual significance is lost sight of. Well it is for us that God passes all our prayers through

the refining medium of His own wisdom, and that He sends us larger and truer answers than we have ever dreamed of—even though those same answers bring us pain and tears where we looked for ease and joy.

His response to our mistaken conceptions is always directed toward the strengthening and upbuilding of character. When in our short-sightedness we fail to seek " first the Kingdom " in our asking, His answering is a correction of our forgetfulness. And although for a season we are in heaviness, we ultimately come to acknowledge that His thought is wiser than ours, as the Heavens are higher than the earth. Faith and patience bring to every man a complete justification of His ways. We learn that what at the time seemed unkindly subtractions were generous additions, and that what appeared to be His unheeding silence was the speech of His love. If He takes away the first, we see after a while that it was in order to the establishment of the second—and best.

And this experience brings us into fellowship with the whole Church. These same afflictions are being accomplished in our brethren in all the world. There are but few among His children who cannot say—

" Humbly I asked of God to give me joy,
To crown my life with blossoms of delight;
I prayed for happiness without alloy,
Desiring that my pathway should be bright;

Prayerful, I sought these blessings to attain—
And now I thank Him that He gave me pain.

I asked of God that He should give success
To the high task I sought for Him to do;
I asked that every hindrance might grow less,
And that my hours of weakness might be few;
I asked that far and lofty heights be scaled—
And now I meekly thank Him that I failed.

For with the pain and sorrow came to me
A dower of tenderness in act and thought;
And with the failure came a sympathy,
An insight which success had never brought.
Father, I had been foolish and unblest,
If Thou hadst granted me my blind request."

Blessed indeed is he who eats bread in the Kingdom of God, even though it be the bread of tears!

II

In the realm of character—the one enduring reality of life—development is only secured, in part at least, by affliction. We can readily summon a host of witnesses from the pages of history to attest this, but their testimony is really unnecessary to our establishment in this present truth. For each has in his own life irrefutable proof that this is so. And each has abundant opportunity for corrobation by observation of the lives of others. We are all able to recall some quite ordinary individual, bright, complacent, apt to be self-

centred and careless of the claims of others, who was suddenly transformed by an unexpected sorrow. Out of the summer sky the bolt fell which darkened his life—the loss of a loved one, the failure of a bank, the verdict of a physician. And in that hour his eyes were opened to the great realities. He began to seek and find God. The latent moral and spiritual potentialities of his being began to assert themselves. Affliction did for him what unmixed prosperity could never do. He began to live. And in his course we each see our own.

The unclouded glare of the sunshine soon scorches a landscape and destroys its verdant life. It needs the wind and the rain and the biting frost of winter, as well as the warmth of summer, to make a fruitful field. And so it is in the life of a man or a nation. Adversity and trouble quicken perception, challenge courage, and awaken energy, as ease can never do. It is thus by such instruments that God works toward the development of the true man within us all. The bread of tears, and the bitter herbs, must be eaten along with the Paschal Lamb, if the pilgrims are to be strengthened for their pilgrimage. And each of them is a better man for his weeping.

This is an interpretation of God's dealings with our Nation in these days. But are we learning His lessons? Is Britain yet low enough before Him? Are we yet weaned from irreverence and materialism and worldliness? Or are vanity and luxury and

carelessness—the things which to the observant eye have been spelling ruin to our land for a long time—merely suspended under stress? Have we yet been quickened into a new life of humble faith and common dependence upon God, or are we merely galvanized into momentary concern for our national safety? These are the questions which press upon us all. They are far beyond those of material efficiency in importance; and the responsibility of answer rests in part with each of us. If Britain's attitude toward God is right in this fiery trial, there shall emerge from it a new nation, girt with a moral and spiritual strength we have never yet possessed, for the carrying out of His will amongst the nations of the earth. And that strength which comes through sorrow is enduring. Those who enter the Kingdom through much tribulation, whether they be men or nations, know the full meaning of their citizenship.

III

Let us then learn to look upon our sorrows as part of the love of our Lord. It is of His concern for us that individually and nationally we are being brought low. It is by His permissive will that, so far, the result of our country's warfare is almost entirely negative and indecisive. It is at His Word that the stormy wind arises to beat upon our individual hearts and homes. And it is of His mercy that discipline has not passed into retribution.

"My winter, yea my tears, my weariness,
Even my graves, may be His way to bless.
I call them ills. Yet that can surely be
Nothing but love which shows my Lord to me."

As we thus regard our sorrow, seeking to fathom its message to our souls, and to respond rightly to its call, we shall find that in the dark we have been feeding upon the Sacramental Bread which God's own hand has ministered. And we shall come forth into the light to expend its imparted strength in the sacrificial service which these days demand. Thus are the sons of God trained for their mission.

For we cannot forget that Christ's tears have become the Bread of Life to the whole world. It is by the suffering of the Man of Sorrows and by His acquaintance with grief that the entire human family has been called to the King's Table, and is there fed. And is it too much to say that we who profess His Name are being fed with the bread of tears that our lives also may acquire a redemptive and sacramental value? Is it not true that for us, as for Him, the immediate experiences of life are preparatory and prophetic of the service by which other lives are saved and sheltered, and to the extent of which there is no measure?

Let us draw nigh then and take the Body of our Lord.

XII

OTHER REFUGE HAVE I NONE

"David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."—I SAMUEL XXX: 6.

NEVER in the experience of any of us were the causes of discouragement so many or so powerful as they are to-day. Over the whole world there broods an anxiety which depresses the spirit of the most ardent, and darkens the outlook of thoughtful men in every nation. This terrible war goes on, and must go on, with unabated fury. Appalling sacrifice of precious life is chronicled daily. Sorrow and gloom have settled upon countless hearts and homes. There are few indeed who have not already been flecked with the spray of the storm. And in all likelihood most of us will, ere long, have to suffer unspeakable anguish as its waves and billows go over us. If ever there was a time when discouragement might be regarded as excusable it is now, had it not been that we are not left without saving guidance as to that renewal of faith and courage of which all are consciously in need. Our experiences are in themselves part of the Divine invitation to draw near to the Holy Place. There is a river whose streams still flow for the gladdening of the

City of God. Our sun may be darkened, but it is not in eclipse. We may think ourselves overwhelmed, but we are really overshadowed by unchanging mercy. And we need to rediscover God for ourselves in these days of strain and stress. Only so shall we be saved from the perils which peculiarly beset the discouraged and depressed believer.

I

An incident in the life of David is strikingly apposite to the present condition of things. He had sustained a serious reverse in warfare. The town of Ziklag, which was his headquarters, had, while he was away on some expedition, been invaded by the Amalekites, and had been burned to the ground. David and his men returned to find their city devastated, their homes ruined, and their wives and children carried into captivity. In sorrow every man wept "until they had no more power to weep." Then, as is the manner of crowds, came a sudden revulsion of feeling. Their anguish turned to anger. So hotly was their wrath kindled against their leader, upon whom they unwarrantably laid the blame of this disaster, that his life was in danger at their hands.

In such an hour of deep anxiety, David had recourse to the only place open to him—the presence-chamber of his God. When everything seemed to be going dead against him he "*encouraged himself in the Lord his God.*" A man may be at his wits'

end, and yet not at his faith's end. The calamity which had fallen like a stroke from an unkindly sky only served to quicken his confidence in God. Driven by his very distress to seek God's face, he made new discovery of the amplitude of his resources. He learned that there was a blessedness of communion to which he had hitherto been stranger. For until then he had never been in just the circumstances which made its apprehension both necessary and possible.

It is well to bear in mind that it was by his own fault that this calamity had come upon him. He had sought sanctuary with the Philistines, because he imagined that Saul, his enemy, was too strong for him. Instead of standing his ground as in earlier days, he had fled for refuge to the land of Saul's hereditary enemies, and had made a kind of alliance with them, imagining that he thus secured his own safety. Had he but trusted God, had he but been loyal to the assurances declared over him by God's prophet in the day when he was anointed as king, these present difficulties had never troubled him.

Under such circumstances men always find it most difficult to come back to God. It is when the consequence of iniquity is upon them that they find it hardest to face Him. And David was no exception in this. Yet he ventured to seek God, for he could do no other. The calamity which had come so unexpectedly had shattered his self-complacency, had brought him to acknowledgment of his defec-

tion, and had recalled him to his true dependence —not upon political alliances, but upon God. It humbled his spirit, and sent him into the presence of God a chastened man. It brought him to the attitude of soul in which alone a man can receive from God all that richness of His grace, and all those blessings of His sympathy which are the factors of true and abiding encouragement.

II

In view of the widespread spirit of religious unconcern which is so sinister a characteristic of large numbers to-day, who are yet deeply concerned about the issues of the War and the prospects of the Nation, it is well to point out that there are directions in which encouragement cannot be successfully sought. It is not, for example, to be found in the reading of venturesome articles by so-called experts as to the probable course of events in this momentous struggle. For these are in the main based upon hypotheses which as a matter of fact seldom eventuate. Nor are we likely to be permanently encouraged by recalling the fact that in previous conflicts our Nation has always succeeded, and concluding hence that she must always be victorious. Nor shall we find true encouragement by under-rating the resources of our foes, as we are invited to do by a section of the Press which publishes conjectures in this respect as though they were certainties. Sooner or later we discover that all such things as these are broken

cisterns which hold no water. And their failure permanently to sustain and nourish our hearts, to rekindle our hope and confidence, casts us more than ever upon God. We need to live in these days amid the great realities which circle around Him. The outlook is dark enough; but the uplook has lost nothing of its eternal brightness. God is our refuge and strength; and in Him alone is to be realized the renewal of those qualities which are vital to the life of a man and a nation.

In what do they find encouragement who seek it in God at this time? First, there is the fact that all discipline, whether of a man or a race, is directed by Him. How surely our land needs chastisement and correction is sadly acknowledged even by those who most dearly love her. We have of late years become headstrong and proud, boastful and vain, contemptuous of God's Word and of His Day; so that He could not consistently with His own nature suffer us to go on for ever unrebuked. While far from believing that this war was God-caused, it is certain that it is being God-used. Nor shall we be able to hail its satisfactory conclusion until the moral lessons it emphasizes have been learned. For there is little evidence that we are yet as a people humbled in penitence, and restored to a right mind. There is little evidence that we have awakened fully to the seriousness of the issue which is being determined yonder on the blood-drenched fields of France. But the fact that our discipline is in His hands Who pities His

children, and corrects them only that they may become partakers of His holiness, encourages us. The entire meaning of the judgments which are now abroad among us is to be found in His undying love. He is not crushing but recreating us. It took calamity to bring David back to God, and it is certain that this is the meaning of that permissive Will under which we now suffer.

Then there is encouragement in the certainty that God's purpose is unchangeable. This David learned as he betook him to the heavenly audience-chamber in his dark day. The kingdom had long been promised to him. The holy anointing oil had been poured upon him. He might well have asked during those long-waiting days of anxiety, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" And he might well have caught the reply, "No! but thou hast forgotten to be faithful." Now, however, memory is quickened by a sense of fear. Faith, after fluctuating like a compass-needle under magnetic forces, rests at its true north—in God. David is encouraged to recommence a life of loyal subjection to His discipline and guidance, with the assurance of the changelessness of His purpose.

And this is the confident encouragement we may find in God at this time regarding our nation. If we believe that Great Britain has come to an end of the Divine purpose, and that her national mission is fulfilled, there is nothing more to say. But since everything points to the largeness of her possible contribution to the work of the Kingdom

of God in all the world, we cannot accept this conclusion. Everything is not lost while the purpose of God persists. Herein we may lift up our hearts.

III

Beyond these facts, which faith transmutes into factors of uplifting encouragement, is the assurance that His love is faithful. The bitterest reflection of David's mind was doubtless that his trouble was self-caused, and that if his early fidelity had been maintained these calamities would never have touched him. From our own consciousness we may infer that he was very likely tempted to despair, as though he had somehow cut himself off from God's favour. But he had to learn, as we have, that there is something far stronger than sin and its consequences—it is the love of God. And he did learn it, and for ever enshrined the lesson in a song whose refrain runs: "There is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared!"

He further learned that God can rapidly organize victory for a man when He Himself is victorious in him. Such is the faithfulness of His love. Does not this encourage us in regard to our present difficulties? Is His love less faithful to the land He has so long blessed? Is He not the God of peoples as well as of persons? Is not all history His story—the story of a love which will not let men go?

Mr. Spurgeon once said, with a flash of spiritual

genius of which he seemed more than most men capable, that love-letters from Heaven are often sent in black-edged envelopes! And those who watch at His gates are increasingly persuaded that this is the interpretation of our nation's present experience. Our ultimate security for victory and the blessings of a righteous and wide-spreading peace is the character of our God. In Him, therefore, let us encourage ourselves in these dark days. And in His reflected radiance let us become lights in a gloom-shrouded world.

XIII

"WEARIED IN THE GREATNESS OF THE WAY"

"Thou art wearied in the greatness of the way."—ISAIAH lvii: 10.

A MISSIONARY who recently returned home after a period of service in the field was greatly struck with the obvious weariness of many of the Christian workers with whom he was brought into contact up and down the country. Nothing impressed him so much as the fact that so many seemed to be jaded and worn out; and he could not forbear contrasting their state very unfavourably with the members and workers of the native Church amongst whom he is accustomed to live. And it would seem as though his observation was justified. On every hand we meet those who show signs of exhaustion and weariness, while courageously persisting in the pathway of duty, and bravely endeavouring to carry out their obligations as in other days. But the buoyancy has gone from their spirits. The song has died down in their hearts. Their steps are heavy, and there is altogether a lack of tone in their utterance. Indeed, their entire bearing is a contradiction of the restful spirit of the Evan-

gel, and compels the consideration as to how far its promises are applicable to the conditions of modern life.

Now, there is little to wonder at in the tiredness and over-strain which appear to be characteristic of large numbers to-day, because life has undoubtedly become harder than ever, especially to those who cherish ideals. Its moral liabilities have increased enormously, while its assets seem to have diminished. We are all realizing that our present burdens are heavier than we have ever known, and that the antagonisms which oppose those who seek to walk on high levels of fellowship with God and men are sorer than we have ever before encountered. The very atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty in which we live is debilitating. Nor do the usual resources by which inspiration is strengthened and renewed, prove effective. To the weary man the Bible seems to yield nothing. The hour of prayer, instead of being a delight, becomes a burden. The fellowship of God's people and the Worship of His House lose their power of appeal. The tired-out man finds them more or less insipid and flavourless, and is prone to let slip the very things he should hold, hardly realizing what he does.

While admitting that all this may be only a passing mood—though with many it seems to be persistent—it is needful to observe that such a mood may have very serious and far-reaching influence upon a man's life. It may, for instance,

make him nerveless, irritable, and quite unready to respond to the calls of duty. Or it may render him fearful and apprehensive, afraid almost of his own shadow, and hence unable to fulfil his high responsibilities. Or, most serious of all, it may induce a moral carelessness which is the certain forerunner of disaster. There is always the danger of over-wearied men doing things which their weariness may explain but cannot excuse. Many a wrong decision, and many an unwise choice whose consequences have marred a life's influence, have been the outcome of this state. And many an utter spiritual collapse likewise. For some men have actually denied the Faith, and have fallen into unspeakable sin, just because they were too jaded to call up their moral reserves in that hour when the enemy launched his unexpected and fierce attack. In a worn-out condition of soul no man can stir himself up to take hold upon God. This being so, how necessary it is for us to understand the possible issues of our weariness, honestly to examine ourselves as to its cause, and to realize God anew in relation to our need of refreshment and recreation. Our efficiency as His servants and witnesses depends on this.

I

Like Israel when Isaiah uttered his prophecy of warning and promise, there are those who are "wearied in the greatness of the way," because that way is a self-chosen and a God-forsaking

way. They have worn themselves out, not by the doing of God's commandments, but by resisting them. For men are not wearied by wearing His yoke, so much as by trying to wear other harness at the same time. It is not sacred duty but selfish determination which exhausts strength and makes life burdensome. Where God's control is interfered with, peace is disturbed and strength diminishes. It is only when His constraint is sensitively obeyed, when His ruling is loyally respected, and when His ways are resolutely kept by the feet of His people, that they go from strength to strength, and not from weariness to weariness. At the heart of a great deal of the exhaustion and weakness amongst the children of God to-day, will be found some secret controversy with Him. Nor will their strength be renewed except by sincere readjustment. Rest of heart can only follow upon cleansing of conscience. The self-wearied man must at all costs get right with God.

This may well involve stern action to which the will must be braced. And be it said at once that every whole-hearted effort in this respect will certainly be reinforced by a Divine energy to which the contentedly weary man has long been stranger. Deferred obedience may be difficult, but it is entirely necessary. For there is nothing of the merely academic or theological in a man's face-to-face dealing with God. The strength and renewal he seeks will come as no mere inference from mental assent to Truth. It is the Divine response

to honest confession and amendment. God asserts Himself in the tides of new life which invariably flow in upon the soul of the man whose repentance toward Him is expressed by a life readjusted in its relationship toward men. It is only as by a sharp operation that many who are in a chronic state of weariness can be saved from permanent moral invalidism.

II

It is part of the proof that we were never intended to be equal to life apart from spiritual enduements, that we do become "wearied in the greatness of the way." The uphill journey, the unequal contest, the many disappointments and anxieties, the haunting uncertainty of the future, all combine to exhaust our strength. And added to these burdens is the present eclipse of our ideals of national life and supernational fellowship, which has brought darkness and perplexity to the increase of our weariness. We are disquieted and disturbed because we are discovering ourselves under the burden of these days. Our secret disloyalties, our unsuspected antipathies, our hidden instabilities, are all becoming more conscious to us. We are verily wearied by our growing self-knowledge.

Beside all this there is not infrequently at the back of our minds an unsettling though unspoken doubt of God's love and power. How can He suffer the continuance of bloodshed and carnage? Why does He not interpose to bring to an end

the horrors of war? When will He vindicate Himself by crushing the wrong and crowning the right? These are some of the haunting queries which weary us almost beyond endurance as we try to find satisfactory answer. And we need to beware lest in our weariness we are betrayed into passing adverse judgment upon God's ways. For in so doing we but condemn ourselves.

The mere fact that we are brought to an end of ourselves "by the greatness of the way," at once testifies to God's unbroken hold upon us and our unexhausted claim upon Him. If we are coming to know by our weariness the inadequacy of every other resource but that of the strength which is made perfect in weakness, we are learning the secret of the life eternal.

III

Christ's word to the weary means much more to us in these days of burdensome waiting and watching than it ever did. For as the weariest Man who ever trod this same earth, He invites us to learn of Him the secret of renewal and refreshment. And as the busiest Man who ever wrought at life's tasks, He teaches us how to live a full life without being overstrained. How did He act when "wearied by the greatness of the way"? It is significant that we find answer both at the commencement and the close of His life.

"Jesus being wearied sat thus on the well"—and talked with a poor sinful woman. His disci-

ples on returning found all trace of weariness gone from Him, and wondered. How had He lost His tiredness? By ministering to one who was yet more weary than Himself! He found in service the unfailing antidote to a tired spirit. And one way of getting rid of our weariness is to do as He did. By establishing and maintaining contact with those who are needier than we are, we shall find rest unto our souls. Your load is heavy; but there are others who are bearing burdens far heavier. Your anxieties are beyond telling; but the blow has already fallen upon your neighbour. Get out of yourself and into fellowship with those who all around you are groping in the dark without a light. Push back the horizon of life beyond the bound of your own concerns. Share with Him the weight of the sins and sorrows of a lost world. So will you lose all your fatigue, and find yourself rejuvenated.

When all the force of the foe mustered against Him, and those on whose comradeship He leaned were unmindful of His travail, facing alone the last crisis of His life, Jesus "began to be very weary." Yet when the hour struck and the enemy came, it was to find Him in calm possession of His soul, ready to lay down the life which no man could take from Him. How had He lost His weariness? Come into the Garden and listen to His prayers, which voice His confidence in the Father. His strength is renewed as He meditates on the Father's care, and stays Himself on His

love. The Cup may be bitter, but it is mixed by the Father, so all is well. The darkness may be deep, but it is the darkness which is "round about HIM." By renewing His confidence in the Father, He was in that hour strengthened to accomplish the world's redemption.

And so it is with His followers. We must get back to that elemental thing in all Christian experience—belief in God's faithfulness. We are wearied, just because we have lost the sense of His purpose, His power, and His presence. And though we may not emulate Christ our Lord in respect of His knowledge of the Father—for there were avenues of understanding open to Him which are not available to us—we may yet know enough to save us from the weariness which threatens disaster to our true life. We may not be able to fathom all the mysteries of the starry Heavens. Yet we can focus them in one moment of time upon the pupil of an eye! And we may each learn enough of the love of the Father, as we wait upon Him, to enable us henceforth to run the whole course of His will, and not be weary. We shall surely exchange our weights for wings as we learn of Christ and follow Him. But only so.

XIV

THE WITHERING GRASS AND THE ABIDING WORD

"The grass withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever."—ISAIAH xl: 7.

IT is an obvious truism that the history of the Gospel is a record of conflict. In every age it has had its detractors and foes. Most of them are now long-forgotten, or, if remembered at all, are only recalled to mind by the absurdities of their pretensions and the completeness of their failure. The Gospel lives by its triumphs. It has outlasted and vanquished all the "glory of man" which has ever disputed its claims. Its theoretic perfection linked with dynamic strength sets it in victorious contrast to every other professed guide of life. And never more triumphantly than to-day. For the foes of the enduring Word are always contemporary, since its message is ageless. It does not seem long since the publication of the "Age of Reason" claimed to have entirely disposed of the idea of God, and to have liberated mankind thereby from an unintelligent and intolerable bondage. In later days the general acceptance of an evolutionary theory of origins, which appeared to be in irreconcilable conflict with the

historic accounts of Creation, seemed to demand that the Bible should reconsider and restate its claims. While in recent years the extremer and more grotesque forms of Biblical Criticism have tacitly credited themselves with victories over all the traditional supremacy hitherto accorded to the Written Word as uniquely and Divinely inspired.

Yet through all the storms which have spent their force in vain, the sacred Volume, in which the Evangel is set forth in prophecy, psalmody, and proclamation, stands unmoved as some great rock in mid-ocean. The waves dash themselves furiously against it, only to be broken in spray upon its immovable front. Despite every detraction, the Gospel still holds to its self-verifying way —comforting the anxious, strengthening the feeble, encouraging the downcast, inspiring the fearful, and saving the sinner. And in all this, confounding its enemies. One of the Waldensian Churches has as its seal an anvil and a number of broken hammers, with the motto

> "Hammer away, ye hostile hands!
> Your hammers break: God's anvil stands!"

This is well expressed. For the verdict of history attests the enduring Word as the Word of the Lord. And in days like the present, when history is being made, all kinds of men turn to its pages for what cannot be found elsewhere. This, and the fact that there they unfailingly realize the sat-

isfactions for which their every instinct of soul cries out, is evidence enough of its entirely supernatural character. The final homage of this as of every preceding age will yet be paid to the only Gospel by which men can worthily live and courageously die.

I

Grass withers in the ordinary course of things by mere process of time. What was verdant and fresh in Spring is faded and dry in Autumn. And time similarly brings into our lives changes which only time can heal. They come slowly and unnoticed with advancing years. Early emotions lose their thrill. The zest of young days soon tempers into the complacency of mid-life. Powers of desire and appreciation imperceptibly weaken as life proceeds. While there are doubtless compensations for all that men lose in the imperceptible passing from youth to age, their withered joys do not flourish again, save in regretful and sometimes resentful memory.

Grass sometimes withers prematurely owing to lack of necessary attention. A lawn which is not cut and rolled and watered soon loses its freshness and velvet softness. The fact of its former beauty only then condemns its present state. It stands a witness to the destructive power of passive neglect. And sometimes it is so also in life. Men lose their earlier experience of peace, their inner sense of joy, their inspiring consciousness of the

reality and worth of eternal things, by sheer inattention to the needs of the soul. The weeds of doubt, of anxiety, and of evil habit grow rapidly when vigilant care is relaxed. The enemy sows tares while men sleep. Thorns spring up and choke the good seed in any life which ceases to be prayerfully attentive to its moral and spiritual culture. It does not take long for a garden to become a wilderness when left to itself. For Nature is wonderfully and ruthlessly self-assertive.

Grass withers prematurely also in consequence of violent treatment. The sharp stroke of the scythe cuts it down, and leaves it to wither and die. Or it is blasted by storm. Or, again, it is blighted by heat. And what was fair and beautiful lies wilted and worthless. Who does not know that life has its corresponding features? And who does not recognize—especially in these days—that the withering grass depicts human experience in at least one of its aspects? A great and ruthless hand seems to swing the scythe which at one fell blow destroys hope, disturbs happiness, inflicts bleeding wounds of pain, takes away cherished possessions, and makes it for ever impossible to reconstruct life in its former values. A blinding storm of sorrow breaks without warning, and earth can never be the same again. For its tenderest and most fragrant blooms have been smitten beyond all hope of recovery. A hot wind of temptation blows with insistent and pitiless fury, under

which the very springs of goodness seem to dry up, leaving whatever there was before of purity and beauty to wither entirely.

It is in the hours when men perceive the withering grass lying about their pathway that they are in greatest peril. Their tacit assumption of permanence is perforce recognized as having been mistaken; and, whatever be the cause, the very fact that life has been disturbed, that hope has been frustrated, and that the world is henceforth an impoverished place, is apt to put the severest strain upon their confidence in God. Once let His goodness be disputed, and it is as though the sluicegates of evil had been opened. For duty becomes irksome, prayer loses its impulse, Heaven-ward obligation is resented, and not infrequently the faith of God is ultimately denied and deserted. This is of all dangers the greatest. And just because it is all around us, a reminder of the enduring Word of the Lord is apposite.

We must face life bravely in the confidence that Christ's revelation of the Father is for ever to be safely trusted. For this Word is an echo of His speech. It rises from the experience of one who learned it at first hand, and who found in it a satisfactory and inspiring interpretation of all life's mysterious phases. There is a salvation, so Christ teaches, which is only known to the man who endures to the end. And there is a casting away of confidence which is the forfeiture for ever of all recompense of reward. If we for our part

refuse to accept any small meaning of the disturbing experiences by which life seems to be made barren, and are courageously satisfied to believe that they have a larger content than faith can yet see, we shall one day come to realize that God Who orders them all has never had in view anything less than our highest good. There is a glory that fades only to shed abroad the seed of its own life. There is grass that withers only that it may fertilize the soil for newer and richer harvests. There is a grace of God which is multiplied to men by the seeming subtractions from their lives which it plans. We must take life's dimensions correctly if we are to be saved from resentment. And we must take them "according to the measure of a man, that is of the Angel."

II

The written Word outlives every foe, not by reason of its historical accuracy, its ethical perfection, its moral beauty, its philosophic reasonableness, or its human sympathy—though it has all these qualities. The secret of its enduring character is Christ Himself. For "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory." And still He lives in our midst. Every page of the sacred Scriptures glows with His continuous revelation of God. The undying message of the Divine Fatherhood is for all time incarnated in the Christ of the Word. And every experience of those who believe in God through Him

bears emphatic witness to the faithfulness and trustworthiness of the record. It belongs to every age alike. For Christ Himself is contemporary with mankind.

The heart of man is always seeking after something permanent upon which to build his hopes. We were never meant to live in the fluctuations of time. The instinct of eternity is deeply implanted within our being. Men are not the children of a day, and hence cannot find their true rest otherwhere than in Him Whose offspring they are. As a vessel must anchor to something outside herself —and immeasurably greater, so a man must go beyond himself ere he can realize strength and security amid all the change and decay which is incident to his life. And whither but to the abiding Word? Here, and here alone, is interpretation of the withering grass and fading glory. And here alone, in the contrast between the perishing and the Permanent, the transient and the Trustworthy, the evanescent and the Eternal, is life's true meaning unfolded. We are lifted above unrest and discontent only when we dwell within the safe defences of the enduring Evangel.

Over against the perplexing "changes and chances of this mortal life" Christ sets the revelation of the Father. His love is persistent in its search after the lost and erring child. His mercy forgives the wrong-doing of the penitent, at unspeakable cost to Himself. His controlling will orders all things for good to them that trust Him.

His faithfulness harmonizes all the harsh and discordant notes of their experience into a love-song. His power is always adequate and always available for the protection of the weak in faith. His Covenant is for life, and goes far out also beyond death and judgment. This is "the Word of the Lord" which "endureth for ever." With certainty we may test it for ourselves in this dark and cloudy day of anxious care.

XV

TO FLEE OR TO FIGHT?

"Oh that I had wings like a dove."—PSALM lv: 6.

THERE are times in life when under the stress of its burdens the human heart is forced to acknowledge its inability to extemporize faith or courage. Indeed, at such times it finds no resource in itself either for the expression of its emotion or the interpretation of its experience. Moreover, the kindly light does not always respond to the summons of fear, the encircling gloom is unillumined by even a star, and to take a false step is both easy and perilous. In such circumstances there is always certain help to be derived from the remembrance that others have passed along this road before us, and that their experience is available for our guidance. We may behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, even though we are unable directly to discern its heights and depths for ourselves. And the reflected light is bright enough to enable us to take our bearings and to shape a true course.

This is the permanent value of such a book as the Psalms, which sets forth the variations of human experience which belong to every age. Passing mood and persistent faith, heartbreaking frailty

and untiring grace are all disclosed there for our warning and heartening. We find ourselves on almost every page; and if we look with sufficient earnestness we find our Lord also. This is why in these present days we turn instinctively to the Psalms, to discover that they are altogether modern, and to find them invested with an understanding of our immediate needs, and with the power of solving our perplexing problems, which no other portion of the Sacred Word seems to possess. From them we learn that other men have had our temptations and have overcome them. The startling disloyalties which we have found in our hearts staggered them also. The enigma of a complex and contradictory personality disturbed their faith, and made them, like us, wrestlers in the dark. They, too, formed mistaken judgments and yielded to wrong impulses. But ever and anon they found in God the ultimate solution of their difficulties, the harmony of their contradictions, the correction of their errors, and the reinforcement of their weaknesses. For His love never lost its grip of them, even when they were most unconscious of it. They were found of Him even when He was not sought of them. This is, above all others, the lesson we need to learn and relearn in days when our hearts fail us for very fear.

Who has not said of late with David, "*Oh that I had wings like a dove; for then I would fly away and be at rest?*"—expressing thus, as we thought, a pious wish to have done with this war-ridden

earth and to exchange its conflicts for Heaven's peace. To every one who takes his spiritual responsibilities at all seriously and seeks to live strenuously, there have come hours when we have felt that the one thing desirable was to escape from life's clash and clamour. Wearied in body and mind, distracted with the anxieties of the strife, and utterly disappointed at the seeming futility of honest effort to arouse moral concern, we are apt to imagine that, if we could only get away from it all, we should be at rest. And so we should—but it would be the rest of death. For it is no worthy prayer either on David's part or ours, that we should escape the irksomeness of our burdens, and be freed from the vexations of the common lot. It is rather the futile soliloquy of one who has lapsed into cowardice. Its aim is unaffectedly selfish; and it is good both for David and for us, that God does not heed it.

I

It would be possible to adduce many illustrations and to suggest many applications of this spirit in modern life. Let the one which is uppermost in the minds of many suffice. The religion of Christ is once more on its trial. In the reconstruction which will follow the avalanche of war, its place in national life will be largely determined by the present attitude of His people toward the tasks and toils which none can now rightly avoid. For young men to evade the duty of courageous self-

dedication; for others, too old and otherwise incapacitated, to shirk the responsibility of personal service and sacrifice under the specious but hollow plea of "business as usual"; for women to seek for themselves or their loved ones the easy and unburdened life, is nothing less than base treachery to the Lord. It is selling the pass to the enemy, for any who call themselves by His Name to attempt to "fly away and remain in the wilderness," where they shall be no longer troubled by that summons to play the man with which life is vibrant just now.

For God has placed us where we are, and entrusted us with such powers as we have, for such a time as this. We may have every sympathy with those who cannot bring themselves to the actual taking of human life; but there are a hundred other ways of serving the cause which claims us all, none of which are open to the questioning of conscience. And if any of us puts personal happiness and ease before the doing of duty in a time of crisis such as this, we betray His honour and become the foe of His interests. For when the task of victory is accomplished, and the Nation's energies are free to rebuild the walls which war has broken down, there will be little place accorded to that religion in whose name men justified themselves when they came not to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

There is no more enviable record than that of the anonymous host of God's people who in old

times "were tortured, not accepting deliverance"—that is, not flying away when occasion served. Such ones always obtain the better resurrection they seek. Nor is there anything more finely characteristic of the great-hearted Apostle than the supremacy he accorded to duty which countered inclination. He wrote on one occasion of "a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." But he was recalled from this longing to fly away and be at rest, by the consciousness of the commission he bore. So he added, "Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance"! And beyond all such supplementary inspirations is the supreme example of the Lord Himself. For He was sorely tempted as we all are, in this very respect of fleeing from the hard lot of suffering, when He prayed "If it be possible let this cup pass from Me." It is the world's salvation that in that same moment He banished the thought, and cried victoriously: "Nevertheless not My will but Thine be done!" Who follows in His train today?

II

When we feel least like taking up the unpleasant responsibilities of life, or most long to escape from its drab monotony, our only safety is in resolutely trampling upon the wayward inclination. To parley with it, or to attempt to make terms, is

disastrous. Self-pity is of all things the most inexcusable in those who have embraced Christ's rule—and the most deadly. For when its impulses are followed in defiance of the protests of conscience, so that pressing obligation is successfully avoided, the man awakens too late, only to find himself impoverished beyond recovery. In shunning the burden and refusing the conflict he has forfeited the qualities which make for Christian manhood, and which are only to be acquired by the courageous. Since also he has taken with him in his flight from the place of duty this disposition of selfish ease which would have fallen from him in the thrill of battle, he becomes a certain victim of moral paralysis. For its fatal germs seem to infect the atmosphere of that particular wilderness which is peopled by those who have unhappily found for themselves the wings of a dove. Thus do those who would surely have realized their true lives by consecrating themselves with cheerfulness to the service of God and man, lose all that gives to any life its true count.

For—

"The life that counts must toil and fight,
Must hate the wrong and love the right,
Must stand for God by day and night—
This is the life that counts!

The life that counts must helpful be,
The griefs and needs of others see,

Must seek the slaves of sin to free—
This is the life that counts!

The life that counts must hopeful be,
In darkest night make melody,
Must wait the dawn on bended knee—
This is the life that counts!"

And it is for such lives that the hour calls. It is by their moral passion and courage alone that the Nailed Hand will be victorious over the mailed fist. How much worthier is it to stand with Him at all cost, than to seek an easy and dishonourable escape!

III

It will save us in our most depressed hours, when the seeming disproportion between the heavy demands of duty and our own slender strength challenges and tempts us, if we bear well in mind one or two quite obvious and simple facts. And we can only be sure of doing this when life's great issues are in question, if we habitually dwell upon them in ordinary days, and weave them at all times into life's warp and woof. One is, that others all round about us are supporting greater needs and heavier burdens, and are called upon to make far costlier sacrifices than our own. It was true philosophy as well as inspired precept which bade men of an earlier day "look upon the things of others"; for there is no more certain corrective

of selfishness. And to all who are tempted to think that life in these days is too much for them, and to flee their embarrassments, we venture to suggest this same course. Go and pay a visit to someone who really knows what poverty is. Enter into the life of one who is battling with sorer temptation than you have ever known. Acquaint yourself—as with a little tact you easily may—with the magnificent struggle that many young men and women in our cities are waging in order to keep their garments unspotted from the world. Go and see the radiant faith of some old bed-ridden saint who praises God continually for mercies which are almost invisible to every one but herself. And it will fill your heart with hot shame because of your cowardice, and send you back to take up the thing from which you thought you must fly, with chastened gladness that God should still count you worthy.

Another thing—and the greatest—which saves us from the perilous desire of opportune desertion, is constantly to review the mercies of God, of which every life is a compendium. "His love in time past" gives the lie direct to our craven fear; since it "confirms His good pleasure to bring us right through"—if we but company with Him. The Cross of Calvary stands between us and shameful flight. And it is well for us to live under its shadow. For there the memory of that hour when the light of Heaven broke through our sin-gloom, when the burden of guilt rolled away

for ever, when we caught our first glimpses of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, is quickened into positive and constant force. There conviction become constraint, and the depression which makes men cowards is blown away as by the bracing winds of God. There we lose all desire for the wings of a dove, finding instead the wings of an eagle, on which we mount up to view life steadily and as a whole, and to receive renewals of strength for running without weariness and for walking without faintness. And there men are made untiring servants and unfearing soldiers under the inspiration of the Love that will not let them go.

Is it too much to say that God and the Nation alike call for the uttermost devotion of all such, in this day when that righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost for which Christ's Kingdom stands is challenged by organized unbelief and personified devilry? To flee or to fight is the issue which confronts us all. And upon your determination and mine how much depends!

XVI

WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth."—MATTHEW vi: 19.

WE have witnessed in these days the bankruptcy and total failure of the best and most lauded philosophical systems of life. The upheaval of international relationships, which has manifested the worst passions of men and has brought sorrow into countless homes, so that for this generation at least life can never again be what we have known it, has done more also. It has forced us all to recognize that something vital is lacking in their commonly-accepted foundations and impulses of conduct. It has given rise to an uneasy consciousness that we have hitherto been looking in a wrong direction for the permanent elements of good in individual and national life alike. There is general admission on the part of serious people—and who is not serious to-day?—that our expectations have been disappointed because our formulæ have been mistaken.

In these circumstances, we believe that the Gospel of Christ will come into its own. The old cry, "Back to Christ," is acquiring new meanings in the present changing order; and there are evi-

dences for which a short time ago we should have looked in vain, that men are beginning to realize that His is the only sure way of life. From the sad welter of war, from devastated cities and ruined fields, and from the wreckage of outraged ideals, eyes are being wistfully lifted to the Hills from whence help can alone come. And in these red skies we seen the sign of the Son of Man. With the utter failure of kingdoms founded on force, self-assertion, and ambition, the Gospel of that Kingdom broad-based on the eternal nature of God, and established in the hearts of His redeemed, is invested with new significance. The future alike of ourselves and of the Nation depends entirely upon sincere surrender to Christ's guidance concerning life's fundamental and essential things.

It is characteristic of Christ that His teaching is never in the form of mere moral abstraction. While He proclaimed principles of conduct, He was always at pains to show also their point of application to human circumstance. While covering the widest range of interests which are contemporary with every age, He stripped many things of their fancied importance, and revealed the really necessary things of life to be but few and simple. In doing this He naturally alienated the sympathies of many. His words both wooed and winnowed them. His presence in their midst was at once a drawing and a driving force. For though they were quick to discern the ethical perfection

of His teaching, they also realized its demands upon their faith and courage. Nor had they, as we have, the compelling imperative of Calvary, nor the supporting dynamic of Pentecost. Hence, while their failure to follow Him may not be altogether inexplicable and inexcusable, ours is. Especially when, as now, it is demonstrated beyond all doubt that there is no alternative to the narrow pathway for those who aspire to the true life.

I

Christ's view of life as an investment is revolutionary. We are accustomed to concern ourselves solely with its expenditure—He with its product. Thus it is that we have been surprised and dismayed at the coming of these present woes, not seeing in them the inevitable outcome of widespread devotion to immediate advantage and material profit. Life is, on the whole, wonderfully just. In its ultimate reckoning men and nations get precisely that for which they have fitted themselves. And all Christ's exhortations are based upon this immutable law. In His searching analysis of the common attitudes and energies of the soul, He bids us—"*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal.*

For where your treasure is there will your heart be also."

Here are the two great conflicting and mutually subversive ideals of good which divide mankind, and which are so insistent that none ever escapes the necessity of adopting either one or the other. This setting of them forth in antithesis implies that success in respect of the one involves loss in respect of the other. Earthly treasure is only laid up as Heavenly treasure is laid down. And the inversion is true also; for Heavenly treasure can only be acquired as the earthly is renounced. At the heart of all human life is obligatory sacrifice. Its issues are for ever determined as individual choice is made of alternative renunciation.

Let it not be thought for a moment that Christ inculcates any lack of prudence in connection with material things, or any disregard of secular duties. He puts no premium either upon asceticism, or upon carelessness concerning human obligations. An astronomical telescope of necessity shuts out a great deal from the view of the user, in order to bring the objective within focus. And Christ's Word has this function also. He compels consideration of concerns supremely important; and directs the soul's vision upon the things that really matter. His strong protest is against the undue secularizing of life, a process which is unconsciously effected by reason of men's keenness after things of earth. He warns us of the worthlessness of ideals which may be outgrown. Since we are

not children of time but of eternity, it is the veriest folly to devote the strength of life to the gathering of treasure which cannot be converted into the currency of the Homeland whither we journey. And yet is not this the very thing that professed Christian men are doing all around us? And is not this long-continued disregard of life's spiritual meaning and value upon the part of leaders and people alike, the ultimate cause of the wholesale suffering and bloodshed at which we all now stand aghast? Are not these things the Nemesis of laying up treasure upon the earth, in defiance of the injunctions of Him Who was never ignorant of what was in man?

II

It is not because there is obvious risk of losing them to moth, and rust, and thief, that Christ counsels against the investment of life in treasures upon the earth. The real point, both of the dissuasion and persuasion of this His Word, is in the explanation of each which He furnishes,— " for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." It is not that earthly treasure is exposed to danger, but that the man himself who labours to lay it up is imperilled. Devotion to any cause writes, as we know, its indelible record on the character. And if the treasure of any life is such as to be liable to deterioration, so too is the heart which abides with it. If it is laid up where the ravages of moth and the corrosions of rust can

despoil it, these same evils will also attack its possessor. Christ's argument is not that earthly treasure is insecure,—for such a fact did not need insistence by Him,—but that it is infective. His warning is not that a man may lose the thing he lives for, but that he may actually lose himself. And it receives undeniable attestation in the experience of individuals and of nations.

This is the explanation of strange loss of quality in many a life once bright with promise. The moth has fretted its garment of holiness. The rust has eaten into the brightness of its witness. Prayerlessness, heedlessness, and selfishness have become the fixed habits of the soul. A growing indisposition for the things of God, and an increasing satisfaction in mere earthliness, declare the work of a thief who has found entrance to an unguarded heart. And from every such life in our midst—and there are many—Christ's warning word is unconsciously re-echoed: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth."

This is the explanation of national deterioration also. Confining our view to our own land—though well aware that everything said of ourselves in this connection is true also of our Allies and our Foes—do we not see on every hand that devotion to earthly things has despoiled our national soul? Despite the unhindered proclamation of the Divine Will, and the undimmed shining of the Lamp of Truth which the Nation has enjoyed for so long, we have as a people largely given our-

selves up to our own ways. Prophets here and there, some within the Churches and some quite outside all organized religion, have declaimed against the enthroned worldliness and the banished godliness by which the common aspirations of our peoples have been revealed. But they have been for the most part as voices crying in the wilderness. It has been easy to dub them kill-joys, and on the plea of larger freedom and fuller life to refuse their message as obscurantist. Now, however, the thunders of war have taken up the burden which the human voice declared in vain, and the world reverberates with the injunction which can no longer be unheeded: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth."

Is the Nation going to recover herself by a sincere moral *volte face?* We have to confess that so far there are few, if any, signs of promise; and it is on this account that we fear we may possibly have still to suffer more keenly. For it cannot be that God will withdraw the judgments let loose upon us until we have learned righteousness.

And is the professed Church going to find her soul in this hour, great with the destinies of men? Again we must admit that we see little evidence that she is shaking herself from the dust and putting on her beautiful garments. Too long and too closely allied with the world in defiance of the command of her Head, the moth and rust have eaten deeply into her life. Now when she should give a clear lead to the Nation in regard to re-

pentance and return to God, a lost voice reveals a lost soul. And this calamity is the outcome of failure to seek those things that are above as her true riches, the certain consequence of laying up treasure on earth.

III

The correlative of Christ's warning is His unqualified encouragement. If men will invest life in the things which are abiding, they shall find within themselves the miracle of a transformed spirit. The heart becomes increasingly Heavenly-minded as every energy is devoted to the strenuous business of laying up the treasure that is immune from all destructive influences. Nor can anything disturb its confidence and peace. It was one who had put Christ's Word to the test and had found it true who sang,

"I stand upon the Mount of God,
With sunlight in my soul;
I see the storms in vales beneath,
I hear the thunders roll;
But I am calm with Thee my God,
Beneath these glorious skies;
And to the height on which I stand
No storm nor cloud can rise."

Surely this is the experience which all must seek in a day when every house built upon earth's sand is threatened. That it is possible so to live above

"the changes and chances of this mortal life" is part of the glory of the Gospel. And that the man who has so learned Christ is able to shed abroad the spirit of peace and the calm of God upon the troubled and tempest-tossed world at this present, is part of life's truest opportunity. For no better service can be rendered by any than to give full proof of this Word of Christ as the sure foundation of every good to his own generation.

If these things are so, then there is nothing more to be said. But there is everything to be done. And that by each one of us.

XVII

NOT TO DESTROY, BUT TO FULFIL

"I came not to destroy but to fulfil."—MATTHEW v: 17.

IT has been well said that he who would speak to the times must speak from Eternity. The only satisfying interpretation of life is that which we get when we stand upon the hills of God, where by the side of Christ we are able to see things in their true proportion and perspective. Unaided and unelevated vision is bound to be mistaken. It is only in His light that we see light. And nothing is more needed to-day than that we should look out upon life, not as an insoluble mystery, and upon its happenings, not as a hopeless tangle, but as the expression of the everlasting nature of God. That Christ once came, declaring fully and finally the principles and the purpose of the Divine Government, makes it possible so to regard life, even in its most troublous days, without fear or panic. To attempt, however, to understand its changing experiences apart from Him is sheer folly and hopeless darkness. Christ has not only the keys of death and hell, but of Life also. He openeth, and no man can shut. He shutteth, and no man can open.

This is the significance of His self-declaration—*"I came not to destroy but to fulfil."* Spoken at first to correct the popular view which regarded Him as a mere iconoclast, it does much more. It announces the entire purpose of His mission among men, and explains much that is otherwise obscure in His doings both then and now. For in the redemption of individual life, and in the reconstruction of the social order, Christ must uproot before He can plant. He must cast down before He can build up. He must overturn before He can establish. Then if He seems to destroy, it is only as a process in the greater work. Never so much as now did we need to bear in mind this explanation of His method.

We see its illustration in His attitude towards the ancient faith of Judaism. Christ did not destroy the Law and the Prophets. What He did was to disentangle Eternal Truth from limited forms of expression. If this appeared to be destructive of outward ceremonial observance, it was only that Eternal Truth might be liberated from every restricting form, henceforth to be preserved in the devotion of men's hearts. The husk must be broken and cast aside, that the living seed within may be secured for its true use. We are profoundly convinced that a true perception of this His way will enable us to harmonize our perplexing experiences with His unchanged purposes, and to receive His discipline—whether individual, social, national, or universal—as being entirely con-

sistent with His love. From how much uncertainty and fear will this save us!

I

In regard to the life of the Nation, we do well to recognize Him at work in these days. One frequently hears men saying, with a gloomy air of finality, that much of our civilization has been destroyed. Of course the Christian's answer to this is that a great deal of it needed to be destroyed! For Christ's rule would be scarcely moral if it did not involve the destruction of much which has of late years been robbing the Nation of its soul. And it is difficult to imagine any circumstances but those which have now come upon us which would be effective in this respect. Something in the nature of a great and overwhelming calamity simply had to come, in order to arrest and bring to an end the flippant folly which was beginning to characterize every class of society to an alarming degree. Now, under the stress of a war which, although God did not create, He allows, much of all this is being practically destroyed. And we are all conscious that the end in this respect is not yet. As a matter of fact, He is but making it possible for us to realize our highest good by the destruction of nothing but that which is itself destructive. He is purging a branch which once brought forth fruit for the healing of the nations, that it may bring forth more fruit.

Do we not see the beginnings of Christ's purpose

of fulfilment in the spirit of sacrifice which has been evoked in all classes, the resolute determination which is binding the whole Empire—that nothing shall be permitted to stand between us and the victory of a righteous cause—and the unmurmuring submission by which new burdens are being taken up and cheerfully borne? For it is by these things that the selfishness, the boastfulness, and the shallowness of former days are being replaced. Destruction there certainly is, but only such as is necessitated by the fulfilment of Divinely-ordered destiny.

And what of the splendid young life which is being devoted without a murmur in response to the high call of duty? This is not destruction. For each has discovered the true purpose of his life,—to spend and be spent for the resisting of evil, the protection of the weak, and the establishment of righteousness. To many of our young men this war has come as a positive redemption from vain, empty, and worthless living. Their lives have been redeemed from destruction, even though they go to death. And like the falling leaves of autumn they will yet live again in the fruit of the earth which has been enriched by their sacrifice. In the final analysis, this is not a war of destruction, but of fulfilment.

II

No man who has himself companied with Christ, needs to look beyond his own life for confirma-

tion that this is the only possible interpretation of God's present energies. For although He does not break the already-bruised reed, nor stamp out the dimly-burning flax, His influence is positively destructive of much that finds unquestioned place in our lives. There are motives, habits, and aims which simply cannot live in His presence. As the micro-organisms of disease are sterilized by the action of sunshine, so the light of Christ's fellowship destroys the germs of passion, of envy, and of all evil. For since every sin is just the inversion of goodness, and every waywardness the expression of capacity, Christ takes our misdirected moral energy and diverts it by the infusion of His Spirit into channels of worthy endeavour. He converts our antagonisms into loyalties, and our antipathies into enthusiasms for the worthy service of life. While He seems to be frustrating, He is actually purifying the aspirations of the soul, destroying only that which is inimical to the fulfilment of that which is deepest in us, and highest in God.

If we but read the experiences of our own lives aright, we shall have no doubt as to what is actually happening around us. For, whether in the realm of individual interest or of National concern, He cannot deny Himself. This is the confidence of the sons of God in a world which seems just now to be one vast grave of destroyed hopes. With Him death is never final.

III

If this is a worthy and dependable interpretation of Christ, there should be a growing approximation to Him in the lives of His people. Our influence must be directed, not toward destruction, but fulfilment. For we are here to represent Him, and to carry on His work. That there is much to be destroyed in the lives of those among whom we serve, is obvious. But it can only be effected by Christ's own method. What is most needed in those around us is not the destructive word of condemnation, so much as the encouraging spirit of comradeship. The beginnings of goodness, of reverence, and of drawing to God have often been destroyed by the un-Christlikeness of those whose duty it was to manifest His Spirit. On the other hand, the warm sympathy which He ever showed toward even the feeblest desires after God, and which encouraged and stimulated the most unlikely in their endeavours, has often guided and saved despairing hearts when manifested through His followers. And it is for this ministry on the part of us all that these days call. We can do more for those around us in their need, for the Church in her feebleness, and for the Nation in its moral want, by our own endeavour to live Christ, than by anything else. Here is service for all who name His Name. There is no worthier aim on the part of those to whom other service is impossible than is expressed by the man who said:

"Let me live in a house by the side of the road
Where the race of men go by—
Men that are good, and men that are bad,
As good and as bad as I.
I would not sit in the scorner's seat,
Nor hurl the cynic's ban;
Let me live in a house by the side of the road,
And be a friend to man."

To-day is one long opportunity of unparalleled possibility for the one who, in fellowship with Christ, will give himself to fulfil the will of God. The final influence of such a life is beyond all measure. For the incarnation of Christ's teaching in these respects has a redemptive value of eternal projection. Hence it is your duty and mine to live constructively, as He lived—in days like these, when the greatest of all needs is of a display of His energy and an assertion of His unfailing aim. Let us begin so to live to-day.

XVIII

THE LONG VIEW OF LIFE

"*Afterwards.*"—JOHN xiii: 36; HEBREWS xii: 11; PSALM lxxiii: 24.

AS only in the darkness of night can we see the brightness of the stars, so in days of gloom and stress like the present the Word of God's Grace acquires a new beauty to His people. Those who wait upon Him are realizing today that "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word." For when hearts are weighed down with anxiety, and life's outlook is clouded with darkening fear, that Word becomes instinct with meaning which in gladder days was never discerned. Amongst other things, its urgent warning against the mistake of looking out upon life as though it were altogether bounded by the present, is gaining new emphasis. Nor is there anything to which we so need to give heed. For when we habitually take short views of life, there is danger of our judging God and His ways with men as though the only available data for a right reading of His character and work were the experience of the present. When we are taken up with things close at hand, whether of pain or pleasure, we are apt to lose a sense of proportion

and perspective. It is thus that a spirit of resentment against God's doings—as though they were not equal—is generated; which, almost more than any other attitude toward Him, is disastrous in its recoil upon the soul.

God's ways are only intelligible to His people in the light of their ultimate purpose. Hence the value of cultivating the long view of life. For we are not mere children of time, but of Eternity. Beyond the horizon toward which we journey is the land—not of the sunset, but of the sunrise. When the noise and smoke and din of war have all blown away there will yet unfold before our gaze the fair land of peace. The Potter's House in which the clay is moulded by pressure of His hand is not our dwelling-place. It is only a halt on the way to the King's Palace, where vessels meet for the Master's use will find their true service. We are not for ever to be on the looms amid the flying shuttles and intersecting threads of mystifying providences. The schoolroom where, under the discipline of perfect Love and Wisdom, our lessons are so often sent back to us to be relearned, is not life's final goal. We are merely being fitted there for the strenuous service of Christ's Empire. Therefore, while there is no suggestion that the present should be disregarded, there is strong reason why we should not unduly dwell upon it. Indeed, we cannot escape the present even if we would; its pain and perplexity press too hard upon us for that. But we must beware of the short-

sightedness of those who forget that they have been cleansed from their old sins, and have thus within themselves an experience of miracle which is prophetic of Christ's ultimate enthronement and supremacy over all.

I

"Thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterwards." Thus does Christ inculcate the long view of life in regard to personal discipleship. Ere Peter can follow him fully, as his heart desires, he must come to understand the fact of his own weakness, to recognize the instability of his own purpose, and to accept the humiliating truth of the inadequacy of his own energy. This can only be as he is brought into conflict with a strength of temptation before which he utterly breaks down. In that hour of self-discovery he learns, in a spirit of humility to which he has hitherto been stranger, how his ideals can alone be realized.

So, too, it is with us. Worsted as we often are in unequal contest with forces we cannot master, we come at last to an end of ourselves, and admit that in us dwells no good thing. That is one of the great hours of life for us. For it is then that Christ's assurance—"thou shalt follow Me afterwards" comes both to save us from despair and to encourage us to new and better beginnings. Having learned our weakness we are thankful to link ourselves in utter self-aban-

donment to His Almighty power. Convinced of our own insufficiency we will now cling closely to Him Who alone can lead us to victory. We are at last upon the Path of Life. This is the interpretation of the painful discovery of tendencies, disloyalties, and surprising moral contrasts which we constantly find within ourselves as the result of temptation. For spiritual processes are never completed here, and to the end the uncharted regions of our being will be brought to light in this way.

These experiences of self-discovery often tend to depress and dishearten us almost to the point of desertion, and it is then that we need to take the long view of life. Only by giving heed to Christ's plain teaching that the present is not all there is of life, that in Him failures may become stepping-stones to conquest, that "thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterwards," can this be gained. And only by refusing any interpretation of life which does not take into account the exceeding greatness of His power, can the long view be maintained under tyranny of insistent fact. Let us bow before the shame of our failures by all means; but let us lift up our eyes also that we may see Him turning and looking upon us, as upon Peter, with all His grace and pity and sympathy unchanged. Then we shall know that the best is yet to be, and that the pain and self-abasement of these hours of failure are but the prelude to a full knowledge of Him, in

which life shall yet be reconstructed to the service of His will.

II

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness." Thus, also, in respect of discipline as of discipleship, we need to cultivate the long view. There is nothing quite so blinding as the experiences of sorrow and disappointment which are Love's veiled sacrament of discipline to the soul. When God so deals with us—never for His own pleasure but always for our profit, that we may become partakers of His holiness—we are in danger of forgetting the preparatory character of life. For we are not yet in a state of being, but of becoming. The short view impoverishes by taking the mystery out of life, and with the mystery the hope also. Let us be certain that any explanation of experience which does not relate it to Eternity is false. There is a despotism of the immediate which breeds self-pity that must be resisted at all costs. For to pity ourselves is to lose every moral value of God's providential handling of our affairs. The short view of life arouses an almost angry spirit of self-justification which puts us hopelessly out of touch with God, when His every voice is calling us closer to Him. This is essentially one of the perils of the believer to-day.

It is impossible to overstate the calamity which

these present days have brought to many of God's children. Loved ones have gone out to the battlefield never to return; hopes have been blighted never to spring again into being; temporal affairs have been disturbed so completely as to be impossible of repair. The keen edge of the sword has cut through our every complacency to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. And nothing but the long view of life can save us from the disaster of utter disheartenment. But it can! The Divine Husbandman prunes the vine branches with a view to the "afterward" of vintage days. He harrows and ploughs into the heart of the soil with His hope set upon the "afterward" of golden harvest. He weeds the garden of the soul, uprooting every noxious thing which would interfere with the "afterward" of fragrance and fruitfulness. And if we learn to adopt His view of the present, we shall be saved from the destruction which walks in this darkened noonday of trial. Let us remember that holiness is not inwrought in an hour. Men are not transformed into the image of the First-Born, apart from suffering and loss. The finer qualities of the soul are not quickened and developed without the refiner's fire and the fuller's soap.

Here then is the interpretation of our present treatment at His hand. If His love seems to take unkindly forms it is only because His purposes can in no other way be effected in us. The justification of the way He takes, and of the instru-

ments He uses for our discipline, is in the certain fruitfulness of the days to come. Let us look then steadily ahead, and we shall find ourselves not merely becoming acquiescent, but satisfied with the entire reasonableness of His discipline. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know . . .!"

III

"Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." The guided life is not always gilded with bright sunshine, nor is the life protected by the faithful counsel of God always peaceful. Indeed, it often appears as though a loyal following of His direction only brings us into fiercer conflict and darker gloom. The scorn of the world inevitably falls upon him who makes the good pleasure of God the guiding principle of his actions. Other-worldliness evokes sharp opposition on the part of those who dwell in Vanity Fair; nor do they fail to make life hard for the one whose ideals condemn their frivolity. Happy as are the hours he spends in the Interpreter's House, the only pathway he can take thence leads through the Valley of Humiliation and to conflict with Apollyon.

To say that the guidance of God is at times perplexing, is but to express all too feebly the consciousness of those who seek to take His way. And here again it is the long view of life which saves them from bewilderment and despair. There

is an " afterward " of Glory to which all the present guidance of Grace is bringing us. The certainty of its end makes the toil of the upward pathway seem as nothing. For since it is His counsel alone which we follow, the ultimate realization of our every hope, and the satisfaction of our every instinct, is never for a moment in doubt. His nature is our ultimate certainty of the " afterward " which has become the glowing horizon of our soul's vision. It is when this great light of Eternity, flashing from the City that lieth foursquare, falls upon every common hour of time, and when we walk in that brightness, that our hearts are stablished and strengthened to do and to bear.

Let us therefore in these days, when so many are taken up entirely with what is happening around, and with the constantly changing prospects to which these events give rise, cultivate the long view of life, which is the Divine view. It will save us from many of the pitfalls and perils which abound, and into which otherwise we readily fall. It will enable us to confront life and duty without panic, and to be submissive under the Divine discipline without irritation. It alone will make us ready for the certain Coming of the King, and secure that in that day we shall not be ashamed before Him. For it will inspire in us a passionate zeal for His service and glory, which will send us out to spend and be spent for the salvation and blessing of other lives, reckoning that the sacrifice and suffering involved are not worthy to be

compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. Does the anxious and gloomy present call for anything more loudly than for a race of believers who walk according to this rule, and mind this same thing? Let us individually determine to be of their number.

XIX

WHERE, GRAVE, THY VICTORY?

"I must shortly put off this tabernacle."—II PETER 1 : 14.

THE real test of any philosophy of life, or for the matter of that of any professed faith in Christ also, is nothing less than this—What does it make of Death? For Death is the single fact of human experience which is for ever removed from the realm of conjecture. It is the one indubitable certainty ahead of us all. Its manner and moment are hidden, except in so far as we know that we shall be "gathered one by one." Despite every advance in the science of life, Death remains the great inexorable event which cannot be staved off. We may ignore its stealthy approach—and it is as well that we should. Deep down in the consciousness of all, however, is the knowledge that sooner or later—unless we are of those who shall be alive, and remain unto the Coming of the Lord—we shall have to meet it. Swiftly and without warning we may any day have to look Death full in the face, either our own death, or that of those who are dearer to us than everything in life. These days have brought this home to us afresh—and perhaps we needed to have it so brought home. For life by its mere pleasant-

ness is apt to deceive us as to its brevity. We incline to live as though our days were unnumbered, whereas their span is already determined. But to the Christian this reminder should bring no fear. The greatest triumph of the Gospel is that Christ has stamped the experience of Death with a new value. In His light we can see light where, apart from Him, would be nothing but thick darkness.

I

We sometimes forget that the mere fact of Death has brought a richness into life which it could not else have had. It is, for instance, the certainty of Death which takes the littleness out of life and invests it with seriousness. The elaborate emptiness, the complicated triviality, and the carefully-planned nonsense which go to the make-up of life for so many, are all revealed in their worthlessness when Death intrudes upon any circle in earth's fellowship of frivolity. It is then that those who are left are ready to listen to the voice of this most eloquent preacher of all, and under his warning to set themselves toward the Life that is life indeed. And it is the enforced recognition of Death which energizes men to worthy activities. When it is realized that life is not an unending continuance, that its horizon cannot be pushed back by one inch, that the length of its opportunity is measured, that "the night cometh when no man can work," it helps, as nothing else does,

toward concentration upon the present duty of living worthily. And it is the sureness of Death which puts passion into human love. For it deepens all our relationships, and clothes our friendships with a significance which they could never otherwise wear. It gives eyes to our affections, and acts as an inspiration to the duties of sympathy and considerateness. Hearts are bound closely together when they share the certain knowledge that one day they must be separated far beyond sound of voice and touch of hand. Yes, Death has a real mission in making life more fruitful. Its solemn shadow is better than the world's sunshine. It gives a value to the present which is beyond all count.

And yet we all instinctively shrink from Death when it draws near either to ourselves or our loved ones. Impotent before its advance, and often staggered by its ruthlessness, how many would give all they possess to buy off its grip! But the great Leveller is implacable. Death knows neither respect of person nor of character. Under its sway rich and poor meet together. When its fiat is launched, all men are one in utter helplessness to avert or avoid its power. For Christians, however, Death has no terrors. The Gospel rings with triumph over its destruction, although a Death—and such a Death—is its central subject. Its exultant proclamation is of a Grave whose stone has been rolled away, and from whence its Victim has emerged a Victor. Having "tasted

Death for every man," He has liberated from its fear all who follow in His train. He has broken its bars and torn away its gates. Death's reign is over!

II

It is quite evident from New Testament history that the knowledge of Christ completely transformed His people's outlook upon Death, and revaluated its power. As the record of their growing apprehension of Him advances, it is noteworthy that the terms which they use, and the figures under which they think of Death, significantly change. At first Death is a sovereign, ruling over a universal kingdom by sheer terror. It is a beast with harmful sting, after the fashion of its progenitor in Eden. It is an enemy, one day to be conquered it is true, but meanwhile harassing and oppressing the whole race. Then later, as Christ was better known and His grace more worthily conceived, Death became but a door into a larger and surer Kingdom, a door whose keys the Son of Man wears at His girdle. The act of dying came to be regarded as the mere casting-off of a ship's moorings, that it might make for the open sea, for the navigation of which it was made. It appeared a positive gain upon even the present joys of life in Christ. Men were bidden to look upon Death as a servant ministering to their highest interests; for this was part of the early positive Evangel, that "all things are yours, whether

Life or Death!" Those who died in the Faith were thought of as resting from their labours. And to all it became a vanquished enemy, conquered by Christ, and for ever powerless to separate them from the love of God—their true life.

All of which goes to show that to the early disciples Death meant infinitely less of terror and shrinking than it means to many of us. For this is not merely the record of changing nomenclature without spiritual meaning. These men had come to regard Death from the standpoint of the Resurrection. Hence it was robbed of its angry look, and actually became bright with a certain power of benediction. It lost its menace because it had found its Master. And He was their Friend and Saviour! With the Puritans of a later day, they could speak of "the death of Death in the death of Christ." Surely we need to recover something of this their confidence, when the shadow hangs dark over every home, and when all around us are men and women to whom the very mention of Death brings nothing but dispeace and despair.

III

Nothing affords a more striking example of the Christian interpretation of Death than the experience of Peter. His early fear of Death had been responsible for his desertion and denial of Christ, when it seemed likely that fidelity would have brought him to Calvary with Him. Later he had learned from Christ's own lips that whatever

might be in store for the other disciples—whether they should live to witness His Return or not—he must certainly die before that great event. This prophetic word isolated him in this respect from every other disciple in his own day or ours. And yet it is significant that his Letters are full of the growing hope of Christ's Appearing. It was this fact more than any other which transformed Death for him. For he knew that united to Christ as he was, he must have some share in it. Death was to him just an interlude of preparation, a going to Christ in Heaven that he might return with Him to earth.

So it is that he speaks of Death as the "putting off of this tabernacle." For him it has been reduced to these simple things, the changing of a garment, and the removal of a tent. One day the body, which is just the garment of the soul, is to be "put off," in order that he may "put on" incorruption and immortality. It is merely the tent in which the pilgrim-spirit rests night by night on its Homeward march. And one day the tent is to be taken down, its curtains rolled up, and its poles and ropes put away. It is to be exchanged for a mansion in "the City which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God"!

If Peter is right in these conceptions, then Christ has imposed rigid limitations upon Death. It can only touch what is outward and unimportant. Our true life is obviously a continuity. For when a man changes his clothes he still remains the same

man. When he ceases to live in a tent and becomes an inhabitant of a City, he is still the same man. You hear people asking nowadays: "Where are the dead?" They are just where they have always been. If they have lived with Christ here, they are with Christ still. If they have consented to live apart from Him here, they are apart from Him still. Death does not work any miracle. It has no power to transform the disposition, nor to sanctify the soul—even though it be gallantly met on the field of battle. It can but deliver to decay the old worn-out garment and weather-beaten tent. The real man, the man united to Christ, is beyond its reach. He is alive for evermore.

We are all either too fearful or too fanciful about Death, and need to rid ourselves of false conceptions regarding it, by living in the light of the Gospel declarations. For in all the story of its redeeming energy and influence, there is nothing which shines out in the Evangel of Christ with such glow as His transformation of the grim fact of Death. Its darkness is past, indeed, for all who accept the still greater Fact of Christ. We may sorrow at its coming, but not as men without hope. We may mourn those whom it snatches from our arms, but not without certainty of glorious reunion. For we are "more than conquerors" over all its frownings and force "through Him Who loved us." What a Gospel for days like these!

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

WITHDRAWN
from
Funderburg Library

252 H71 c.1
Holden, John Stuart, 150101 000
The confidence of faith / by J
3 9315 00003524 3
MANCHESTER COLLEGE LIBRARY

252
H71

11043

Manchester College Library

RULES

1. Books of fiction may be kept two weeks and may be renewed once for the same period. The time limit for books of non-fiction shall be determined by the librarian.

2. A fine of one cent a day shall be charged on each book kept overtime, except reserved books. A fine of two cents per hour will be charged for reserved books which are not returned at the time specified by the librarian when the book is taken. No book will be issued to persons incurring such fines until they have been paid.

3. All injuries to books beyond reasonable wear and all losses shall be made good to the satisfaction of the librarian.